LOTUS

YELA BIN ZILA

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Bismillah

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THE BREATH + THE PULSE

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THE BREATH

MOVEMENT I

THE HIDDEN GRAMMAR

I do not enter the unseen as a tourist. I enter as a man who has watched the visible world fail to explain itself.

A bomb can tear a room open, but it can't tell me where the voice goes when the throat is gone. A machine can count the body, but it can't weigh the dream that lived inside the body. A border can stop my feet, but it can't search my dead for the language they carry into rain.

So I have learned to work with candles, not because wax is wiser than grief, but because flame is honest about what it does: it consumes, it reveals, it trembles, it vanishes upward.

This book is a light grimoire: a grammar of the hidden that refuses domination. A book of breath. A book of thresholds. A book for those who suspect the world is

larger than the five senses, and more wounded than any doctrine has admitted.

I will not teach harm. I have seen enough of harm wearing uniforms, enough of harm holding scriptures, enough of harm pretending to be necessity. My craft is witness. My ritual is naming. My discipline is attention. My spell is to stand before the false reality and refuse to call it whole.

If there is magic here, it is the oldest one: to look at a thing until it confesses what it is made of.

The veil isn't a costume. It's the wound in the air asking whether I will become more tender after looking through it.

—

Threshold: The Breath Before Shape

Before the symbol, there was breathing.

Breath is the scripture the body reads before language learns to divide.

Before the circle learned to close, before the triangle learned to stand, before the first temple decided which way to face the morning, the body received the invisible and called it life.

So I come back to breath whenever the unseen grows too crowded with names. A name may become a gate. A number may become a staircase. A star may become a warning or a wound. But breath doesn't argue with me. It

enters, leaves, and enters again, teaching without lecture that spirit isn't elsewhere. Spirit is the visitor we host every second and forget to thank.

If there is a hidden order, let it first make me gentle. If there is a code, let it not turn me arrogant. If there is a ladder in the body, let me climb it without stepping on another soul.

—

Corn, Nightshade, and the Mind

The mind is a field, yes. But no field is innocent. Ask the soil of my homeland. It has grown olives and bones from the same brown mouth.

The old teachers say: plant corn, reap corn. Plant nightshade, reap poison. They speak as if thought enters the earth alone, as if history does not come with its boots on, as if the farmer is always free to choose the weather.

Still, I know there is truth in it. A sentence repeated long enough turns into a shovel. Fear, repeated long enough, digs a room. Love, repeated long enough, opens a window even in a prison.

So I watch what I plant. I don't let empire plant the word collateral in my field. I don't let despair plant the sentence nothing will change. I do not let grief plant a house and call it my country.

Every morning I stand at the edge of my inner acre with two seeds in my palm. One says: you are only what happened to you. One says: you are also what you water after it happened.

I have buried both. I have tasted both. The poison grows quickly. The corn takes patience. That's why impatience is dangerous.

The seed I water in secret becomes the country I carry in public.

—

The Hundredth Monkey at the Well

A monkey washes sand from a sweet potato. Another sees. Another learns. Then a hundred. Then, the story says, the knowledge leaps water and wakes on another island.

I don't need the tale to be laboratory-perfect to understand its hunger. Every occupied people knows this mystery: one child refuses the lie, then another, then a grandmother, then a street, then a city. One throat becomes a weather system.

A lesson can travel without passport. A courage can cross the sea before the body does. A song sung in one camp can appear in another camp wearing different dust.

Here is what the powerful fear: consciousness isn't a private room. It's a market. It's a mosque at dawn. It's a thread through the sleeve of every living thing. Touch one knot with fire and the whole cloth remembers heat.

Maybe freedom is like that. Not a single hero kicking open a gate, but a threshold number of ordinary souls washing the grit from what they were given, saying to the younger ones, look, it doesn't have to be eaten dirty.

—

I Am, and the Work After Saying It

I am is a door. But a door is not a journey.

Too many mouths have made a mirror of the sacred phrase. I am rich. I am healed. I am chosen. I am light. Then the hands remain asleep, the feet remain in the old road, the heart stays an unpaid worker in the factory of wanting.

No. I am must be followed by proof. Not proof to the world. Proof to the nervous system. Proof to the dust. Proof to the small angel assigned to watch whether I move when I speak.

When I say I am a witness, I must look. When I say I am merciful, I must loosen the fist. When I say I am free, I must stop decorating my chains. When I say I am alive, I must stop negotiating with the grave inside my habits.

God said I Am and creation moved. I say I am and the kettle still waits for my hand. This isn't failure; it's instruction.

The spell isn't the sentence; it's the sentence married to breath, breath married to action, action married to time.

A declaration without a changed hand is only incense with no fire.

—

The Bamboo Beneath the Dirt

For years, nothing breaks the surface.

The neighbor laughs. The friend offers faster seeds. The mirror asks whether I am watering a grave. Even my own shadow grows bored of waiting beside me.

But roots are a private miracle. No trumpet announces them, no crowd claps for the underground. Faith, in its most humiliating form, is water poured onto what still looks like absence.

I have been this dirt. I have been the man kneeling before it. I have been the buried green thing receiving water in darkness, unable to explain to anyone that height was being prepared below humiliation.

The world worships arrival because it can't see preparation. It calls the sudden growth luck. It calls the five hidden years nothing. It does not understand that the tallest things must first negotiate with the deep.

So I keep watering. The poem. The prayer. The body. The mercy. The impossible country under the ash.

—

The Buffalo Enters the Storm

A cow runs with the storm and remains inside it longer. The buffalo turns toward thunder and crosses through.

This is not a sermon against fear. Fear has saved many of us. Fear has told the child to hide, the mother to turn back, the refugee to move when the night looked empty. I don't spit on fear. I thank it, then ask it to stop driving.

There is a storm I inherited. There is a storm I survived. There is a storm I have mistaken for personality. Each one asks to be crossed differently.

Some days the bravest magic isn't a candle, not a sigil, not a whispered name from an old book. It's a grown soul turning toward the cloud it has avoided for thirty years and saying: If you are mine, rain. If you aren't mine, pass.

On the other side, the grass isn't paradise. It's simply wet and real. Sometimes that's enough.

Courage isn't the absence of thunder; it's learning which storms are asking to be crossed and which are asking to be survived.

—

The Five-Fingered Star

My hand opens, and the old pentacle appears without chalk.

Earth in the jaw, where bread turns into body. Water in the mouth, where thirst learns prayer. Air in the nose, where God lends breath without contract. Fire in the eyes, where light enters and becomes witness. Ether at the brow, not above the world, but threaded through it like a silent string through beads.

They taught many children to fear the star. They said every old symbol was a trap. But a symbol is a knife: it may cut bread or throat depending on the hand that holds it.

The holy is not offended by geometry. It is offended by cruelty.

I will not surrender the body to fear. My bones are not demonic because they remember geometry. My breath isn't forbidden because it wants to climb. My forehead is not wicked because it asks what sight becomes when the eyes are closed.

The body isn't a prison only. It's also a map drawn in salt, blood, hunger, milk, electricity, and ache. If there's a fifth

element, maybe it isn't ether alone. Maybe it's consent: the soul agreeing, for one brief lifetime, to be carried by clay.

—

Ether, the Missing Chair at the Table

Fire speaks. Water remembers. Earth keeps. Air carries. Ether listens.

I was told the old ether disappeared from science like a suspect leaving by the back door. Maybe the physicists were right to change the name. Maybe the mystics were right to keep a chair for it anyway.

Every age renames the invisible. Spirit. Field. Aura. Chi. Mana. Information. Quantum foam. Breath of God. The names quarrel like cousins at a wedding, but something remains uninvited and present.

I have felt it in rooms after prayer. I have felt it over graves. I have felt it in the silence after bad news, when everyone is still breathing but no one has yet decided how to continue being alive.

Ether is the room between fact and meaning. The bridge between the known and the unknown. The soft country where a mother's worry reaches her son before the phone rings.

Don't ask me to prove it with instruments. Some instruments are too loud to hear the subtle. A scale can weigh bread, but not why the hungry share it.

—

Thirty-Three Bones and the Ladder

There is a ladder in the back of the body.

Some call it spine. Some call it Jacob's ladder. Some count thirty-three bones and remember prophets, initiates, beads, hidden oils, old Christos flowing down and up like a secret river.

I am careful with such claims. The body has suffered enough from men turning metaphors into cages. I won't say salvation lives in a gland, or sin burns a sacred secretion, or the poor are sick because they failed to climb their own bones.

But I know this: posture is theology; the bowed back learns one scripture. The lifted chest learns another. Breath moving up the spine can become a procession. Stillness can make a cathedral of vertebrae.

When I sit, I feel the lower animal and the upper angel sharing one narrow staircase. One asks for sugar, heat, sleep, touch, escape. The other asks for patience, witness, mercy, God.

Maybe holiness is not killing the animal. Maybe it is teaching the animal to climb without shame.

—

Water Without Light

Before the first face, there was water without light.

I floated in my mother before I knew I had a name. I floated in the old dark, fed by a cord, hearing the muffled world as thunder through a wall. No border. No mirror. No passport. Only pulse and salt.

Later they told me earth is mostly water. They told me the body is mostly water. They told me the ocean remains mostly undiscovered. They told me memory lives in the brain. The mystic in me asked: What if the body is an ocean pretending to be a man? What if grief is a tide? What if prayer is a river trying to find its old sea?

Water is the first witch. It changes shape without losing itself. It enters cup, cloud, blood, tear, womb, grave-soil, kettle, rain gutter, and still answers to thirst.

I have washed my hands and not been clean. I have cried and been baptized by no priest. I have watched rain fall on rubble as if God were trying again, drop by drop, to remember us into softness.

—

The Face I Borrowed

This face is borrowed.

I say this to the mirror when it begins to lie. The beard, the tired eyes, the lines that look like roads after exile, all borrowed. Even the expression that grief has rented from me for years isn't the owner.

The soul wears flesh the way a traveler wears a coat in winter. Necessary. Warm. Sometimes beautiful. Never final.

I have loved faces. My mother's. My father's. Sarah's. Ramallah's face when sleep arrived before the story ended. If faces are borrowed, love is the ache of recognizing the lender through them.

One day this face will be folded and returned to the earth. The mouth will stop making weather. The eyes will give back their fire. The body will become a village of elements again.

But something in me has always looked through the face. Something that can't be photographed. Something that existed before my first wound learned my name.

—

BOOK III - THE TONGUE AS WAND

Effatha

Open, says the sacred word.

Not open like a shop, not open like a wound forced by impatient fingers. Open like a path that has been waiting inside stone. Open like a throat after years of swallowing the truth. Open like the door a mother leaves unlocked when war scatters her children into rumor.

Effatha. The word doesn't push. It loosens.

I have stood before blocked things: a visa office, a silent God, a sealed family story, a poem that would not bleed, a future that looked at me through iron. I used to demand the gate break. Now I ask the hinge what it remembers.

Every path opens first in the breath. The mouth becomes a key only after the heart stops lying about what it wants.

So I say it not as trick, not as circus, not as a coin from a magician's sleeve. I say it over the places in me where fear became architecture. Effatha. Open. Let the sealed room become a room again.

—

Numbers That Refuse to Sleep

Three. Six. Nine. Ten. Twelve. Twenty-six. Thirty-three.

Numbers gather in the occult like birds on a wire before a storm. Some say they are the code of God. Some say the elite use them as locks. Some say the universe counts itself into being.

I don't kneel to arithmetic, but I listen when patterns knock. Twelve around the one: disciples around a teacher, imams around grief, signs around the sun, spheres around a sphere, months around the wound of a year. Thirty-three in the spine, thirty-three on the beads, thirty-three as water leaves ice and becomes movement. Twenty-six in sacred letters. Ten heavens. Seven colors. Four elements. One breath.

The danger isn't number; it's when number becomes a throne and the human disappears beneath it.

If I count the dead, I must not let the count replace the names. If I study the code, I must remember the child outside the equation. If God is a mathematician, He also knows the smell of bread.

If the code makes me forget the child, the code has become an idol.

—

Hexagram, Hearth, and the Refusal of Hate

Two triangles meet, and men begin to argue over ownership of the sky.

One points upward like flame. One points downward like water. Together they make a star with six points, a seal, a wound, a nation, a fear, a history, a spell, depending on the mouth describing it.

I have little patience for those who turn symbols into knives against a people. In my own house, Jewish memory and Muslim prayer have both passed through the same air. I was born where the old signs were made to stand trial by men with short memories and long weapons.

A symbol can be misused. A symbol can be recruited by empire. A symbol can be dragged through blood and still not belong to hatred alone.

I will study the star without cursing the hand that prays beneath it. I will study the seal without feeding the oldest lies. I won't let the occult become a mask for prejudice.

Fire and water meet in the body every day. Breath rises. Blood descends. The human being is already a hexagram, already contradiction, already covenant.

A symbol is innocent until a frightened hand teaches it to accuse.

—

MOVEMENT II

THE DARK ARCHIVE WASHED

Harut and Marut in Babylon

In Babylon, the story says, two angels walked through the market with forbidden knowledge in their hands.

They didn't hide the cost. We are a test, they warned. Learn this and the benefit may be smaller than the wound. But humans have always leaned toward locked doors. Tell a man don't open, and his fingers become theologians of disobedience.

Magic begins, perhaps, when power comes before wisdom. The ability to divide lovers, summon forces, bend attention, frighten the unseen into obedience. The childish dream of command.

I've seen enough command. Command at checkpoints. Command in governments. Command in fathers who fear tenderness. Command in priests who mistake obedience for God.

So if an angel offers me power, I ask first: What will it do to my mercy? What will it make easier to justify? Whose freedom will become the price of my control?

Babylon isn't behind us; it's every place where knowledge is sold without humility.

—

The Mountain Where the Forbidden Page Burned

There are books that should be read only by lanterns with honest flames.

A mountain. A night. Two men. Fire fed as words rise from a forbidden book. Then the stones begin to move. Voices appear from the dark like knives remembering their handles. The unseen, if angered, doesn't always roar. Sometimes it first asks whether you understand the door you opened.

I don't mock the fear of jinn. My people have always known there are rooms beside our rooms. The world is crowded with witnesses. Some are angels. Some are tricks of the blood. Some are names we gave to what grief did in the nervous system. I know the comparison is imperfect. Some are older than our arguments.

But I know this: any craft built on domination will eventually meet the thing that refuses to be dominated.

A book can be dangerous not because ink has claws, but because hunger reads faster than wisdom.

—

Wadi al-Jinn

There is a valley where cars roll uphill toward Medina, they say.

Maybe the hill is an optical trick. Maybe the earth tilts its prayer. Perhaps the jinn are laughing at measurement. I

don't need to solve the valley to love the question it leaves behind.

Every landscape has a theology. Mountains teach scale. Deserts teach thirst. Rivers teach surrender. Valleys teach that what appears low may be pulling everything toward the holy.

I imagine a tired pilgrim stopping there, engine off, hands loose on the wheel, watching the road carry him in a direction the eye rejects. He thinks: even motion can have secrets. Even gravity can be misread.

So much of life is Wadi al-Jinn. The thing looks uphill, but something hidden draws us. A grief that should have ended moves forward. A love we buried begins rolling toward us. A prayer we forgot finds its own road back to the source.

—

Black Sun

The black sun isn't the absence of light. It's light swallowed so completely it becomes source again.

Alchemists knew the blackening. Nigredo. The rot before gold. The stage where the proud material dissolves, where the soul sees its shadow without perfume.

But the world has also seen symbols stolen by men who wanted darkness without transformation. Men who wore

myth like armor, who mistook the abyss for permission, who turned the void into a flag and called it destiny.

I approach the black sun carefully. I don't let it flatter my despair. I don't let it recruit my rage. I ask it the only question that matters: Are you here to erase me, or to remove what was false?

There is a holy darkness. The womb. The soil. The night before dawn. There is also a darkness that eats the name of the other and calls the hunger sacred.

May I know the difference before I light anything inside me.

—

The Forest That Eats Despair

Some forests are not forests. They are listening arrangements.

The trees stand close enough to become a thought. The path folds back on itself. The compass becomes embarrassed. The silence grows teeth, not to bite the body, but to taste the sorrow walking inside it.

I've heard of forests where the broken come willingly, where despair finds a green mouth, where the land remembers abandonment so deeply it keeps asking for more of it.

I won't romanticize this. The dead deserve tenderness, not folklore alone. Every soul who entered such trees carried a

history, not merely a mood. Hunger, shame, illness, loneliness, a last unbearable hour.

If the forest is a machine, then mercy must be a greater machine. A hand on a shoulder. A phone answered. A meal delivered. A sentence spoken before the person steps too far: Come back. There is bread somewhere. There is morning somewhere.

No spirit has the right to harvest despair. Not a demon. Not a system. Not a country. Not an algorithm. Not even a beautiful forest.

—

The Hollowed

There are stories from Persia of men without souls, bodies moving, mouths speaking, eyes vacant as abandoned wells.

The frightened call them hollowed. The cruel call them proof. I call them a warning about what happens when a person survives by removing too much of himself.

Trauma can teach mimicry. A child learns the face that keeps adults calm. A worker learns the smile that keeps the corpse-corporation fed. A citizen learns the slogans that keep the border satisfied. One day the mask becomes so practiced that even the mirror claps.

Some souls don't vanish. They go quiet because quiet was once the only room that kept them alive.

But somewhere inside, a small original thing knocks.

The old tale says to ask for a childhood memory and run if the pause is too long. I say ask more gently. Ask: Who held you when you were afraid? What did rain smell like where you came from? What song did your mother hum without noticing?

If there's still a soul, it may answer first as weather.

—

The Door and the Doctor

Discernment Interlude

Not every voice is an angel.

Not every shadow is a demon either.

Not every panic is prophecy.

Not every dream is instruction.

Some doors need prayer.

Some need sleep.

Some need a doctor.

Some need a friend who answers the phone.

I say this because mystery can become arrogant when it forgets the nervous system.

The unseen is real enough to humble me, but the body is also real. Chemistry is real. Exhaustion is real; grief can make a room speak. Trauma can dress itself in symbols. Loneliness can turn an echo into a command.

I won't mock the one who hears what others don't hear. I will not shame the one whose sleep has become a country

of alarms. I will not tell the frightened mind that it has failed God because it needs help from hands with training.

Medicine isn't betrayal.

Therapy is not exile from wonder.

Rest isn't spiritual weakness.

A diagnosis isn't a prison unless the world uses it cruelly.

If a voice tells you to harm yourself or another, don't call it holy. Call someone. Wake the house. Find the doctor. Find the friend. Find the ordinary light that keeps a human being here.

If the shadow grows teeth, open a window. Drink water. Eat something with salt. Place both feet on the floor and let the floor be enough revelation for one minute.

If the dream keeps returning, write it down, yes, but don't let it become king before morning has questioned it.

Discernment isn't suspicion of the sacred; it's how the sacred is protected from panic, ego, hunger, and old wounds pretending to be angels.

The door may be spiritual. The doctor may be necessary. The prayer may be true. The pill may be mercy. The friend on the phone may be the angel arriving in the only form the night could bear.

So I bless every honest helper.

The imam who says rest.

The therapist who says breathe.

The nurse who says stay with us.

The friend who says I am coming over.

The mother who turns on the kitchen light and makes tea without asking the darkness for its credentials.

Let no mysticism make us careless with the living.

And let no wound crown itself prophet before it has been held, fed, named, and seen.

Let the hidden door open only with mercy on both sides.

And if the night becomes too loud, let the first spell be simple:

stay.

stay.

Stay until help arrives.

Discernment is mercy refusing to let mystery become another way to abandon the body.

—

BOOK V - DEATH, DOOR, AND MOTHER

Death Takes a Holiday

Imagine death asking for a day off.

It enters the world in a borrowed body, tastes peanut butter, hears jazz from a passing car, falls in love, and starts to understand why humans bargain so desperately with endings.

Death isn't precious. Life is. But death gives life its edge, its urgency, its impossible sweetness. A cup matters because it can break. A child matters because time isn't guaranteed to kneel and stay. A kiss matters because the mouth is mortal.

I have hated death. I have cursed it in Arabic, in English, in the private language of teeth. I have asked why it knows the way to houses where children sleep.

But if death ever sat beside me like a tired traveler, I would not ask why it exists. I would ask why it arrives so unevenly. Why it comes to the poor with boots and to the powerful with curtains. Why it mistakes weddings for doorways. Why it has not learned mercy from all the mothers who have begged it.

Then I would pour tea. Even accusation needs a table.

—

The Mother Word

At the end, they say, many mouths return to the first word.

Mother.

Not empire, not bank. Not achievement. Not the title printed under the portrait. Mother. The beginning calling from behind the curtain. The first country. The hand before grammar.

I know this one too well. When my pain becomes older than my pride, I don't call for philosophy. I call for the room where I was once forgivable without performance.

Mother, may I rest my head, though I didn't try my best?

This is the prayer beneath all religions. To be received while unfinished. To be held without presenting evidence of worth. To come back carrying failure, dust, age, shame, and still hear: here. Here is the place beside my ribs.

If God is merciful, then somewhere in God there is mother. Not softness only. Not sentiment. The terrible capacity to remain open after being exhausted by love.

The first country wasn't land. It was someone's arms.

—

Two Children in the Womb

In the womb, one child asks if there is life after delivery. The other laughs. For me, there is only cord, only water, only wall, only the scientific certainty of this darkness.

Then one says: maybe mother is all around us.

I have lived that argument. The atheist in me points to the wall. The mystic in me hears a voice through it. The journalist in me asks for evidence. The grieving father in me says: I don't need certainty, I need my daughter somewhere the bombs can't reach.

What if death is delivery? What if our panic is the terror of leaving the only world our senses can prove? What if the cord we call body is cut and we mistake the cutting for annihilation?

I don't know. I will not pretend to know. But I have felt presences in silence that were not made of wish alone. I have heard the dead arrive as scent, bird, dream, sudden warmth, a sentence in another person's mouth.

Sometimes faith is not belief. For me, it is listening through the wall.

—

The Light at the Door

Some warn: don't trust the light when you die. Some say the tunnel is a trap, a harvest, a recycling machine dressed as comfort.

I don't know the architecture of death. Anyone who speaks too confidently about the next room is usually selling a key they have never used.

Still, I understand the suspicion. The living world has taught us that light can be staged. Governments light press conferences while hiding graves. Screens glow while loneliness multiplies. A drone's eye sees in brightness before it erases a roof.

So maybe the deeper instruction is not reject the light. Maybe it is discern the light. Ask what it asks of you. Ask whether it increases fear or freedom. Ask whether it demands obedience or awakens love. Ask whether your dead are being used as bait or arriving as mercy.

If I meet a light at the last threshold, I pray I will have trained my soul well enough to recognize the difference between source and spectacle.

—

The Egg Without a Shell

A story says every person I meet is myself in another life.

The beggar. The soldier. The child. The woman at the market choosing tomatoes. The man who signed the order. My father. My enemy. My daughter. The stranger I failed to help because I was late for something I cannot remember now.

If this is true, cruelty is stupidity at a cosmic scale. To humiliate another is to spit upward in a universe with

perfect aim. To feed another is to remember oneself before hunger comes wearing a different face.

I don't need reincarnation to be literal to accept its moral thunder. Every soul is training me out of the illusion of separation.

Perhaps the universe is an egg. Perhaps we aren't born until we have lived enough lives to understand that no one escapes the other.

Until then, I practice hatching.

—

MOVEMENT III

THE GREAT THOUGHT AND THE MACHINE

BOOK VI - THE GREAT THOUGHT AND THE MACHINE

The Universe Looks Like a Thought

The physicist says the universe may be less machine than thought.

The mystic smiles as if an old cousin has finally came at dinner. We told you, he says. Maya. Leela. Dream. Breath. Word. God thinking stars into temporary obedience.

I am careful here too. Science is not a costume for poetry, and poetry is not failed science. But both stand before the same night holding different lamps.

If the universe is a thought, then matter is a heavy sentence. If consciousness is primary, then body isn't prison only, but punctuation. A comma of flesh. A brief grammar of hunger and touch.

I look at my hand and ask: Am I seeing the world, or is the world learning how to appear through me? Is the eye a window, or a projector? Is the dead child gone, or has my receiver lost the frequency?

The answer doesn't arrive. But the question changes the room.

—

The Receiver Brain

Maybe the brain doesn't create consciousness. Maybe it tunes it.

A radio doesn't manufacture the song. It receives, filters, distorts, amplifies. Break the radio and the music seems gone, but perhaps the field remains singing beyond the cracked speaker.

This thought is dangerous if used badly. I won't tell the sick to abandon medicine. I won't tell the grieving their pain is only a frequency. I won't turn mystery into arrogance.

But I keep the metaphor because it's kind to wonder. It lets me imagine that the self isn't sealed in the skull like a prisoner in a tower. It lets me imagine prayer as tuning, silence as calibration, love as signal, trauma as static, and death as the breaking of one device, not necessarily the burning of the broadcast.

Some days I am only static. Some days I receive my mother in the smell of lentils. Some days I receive God as a small instruction: drink water, answer the message, forgive the old man, begin again.

—

The Oracle Has a Server Room

Once, the oracle sat above vapors and spoke in riddles. Now it lives in servers cooled by machines.

We ask it where the soul goes. It offers articles. We ask whether matter is real. It offers arguments. We ask for God and receive a list of citations, each one a little candle with a corporate shadow behind it.

I don't hate the machine. I have seen machines carry voices across exile. I've also watched a message arrive from a place where the body could not go. But I know the difference between an answer and a presence.

The oracle can search. It can't kneel for me. It can imitate prayer. It can produce a poem about grief. It can't bury my dead.

Still, the machine has entered the temple, and the temple must learn discernment. Not fear. Discernment.

The new wizard isn't the one who rejects the machine; it's the one who knows when to close it and feed someone.

The machine can answer quickly. It can't sit beside me until the answer becomes bearable.

—

The Present Is a Knife

The past is a thought wearing dust; the future is a thought wearing perfume. Only now has hands.

This is hard for those of us who survived by time travel. I go backward to interrogate the wound. I go forward to rehearse disaster. I leave the present unattended, and thieves enter.

But the present is the only place where a spell can become an act. The only place where apology can leave the mouth; the only place where bread can be broken. The only place where the phone can be picked up before the last meeting becomes final.

Kairos is not clock-time. It is the ripeness of a moment. The breath before a confession. The second before courage either arrives or turns into regret.

I have missed many such doors. I have stood before them afterward with flowers in my hand, asking the locked wood to become time again.

—

Mate

Mate isn't a drink. It's a small republic of turns.

One cup moves hand to hand. The bitter leaf becomes hospitality. The pause becomes law. The person who prepares it becomes servant and priest. Rich, poor, soldier, worker, grandmother, student, all briefly governed by the same warm vessel.

I understand this because my people have bread. Coffee. Tea. Lentils. Small ceremonies of not surrendering to despair.

Civilizations aren't preserved by monuments alone. They are preserved by habits of sharing. By the neighbor who has sugar when your house has none. By the kettle placed on the stove before the politics begin. By the phrase, sit, drink, tell me.

The occult hides in plain rituals. Every shared cup says: I will not let you become only your private thirst.

If there's a spell against loneliness, it may look like this: one vessel, many mouths, the dignity of waiting your turn.

—

My Cup Overflows

A glass of water. A pinch of sugar. A psalm. Three sips. A little poured at the doorstep.

I don't laugh at household magic. The poor have always known how to make theology from what the rich overlook. Water, salt, sugar, oil, thread, candle, threshold, breath. The grandmother's grimoire is often the kitchen.

My cup overflows. The line is not greed. It is abundance refusing humiliation. It is the soul saying I was not made to live permanently at the bottom of myself.

But let the cup run over into justice. Into generosity. Into doors opening for more than my ambition. Into success that doesn't require another person's erasure.

Before I step outside, I pour a little sweetness to the world and ask the world to remember sweetness when it sees me coming.

—

The Alley With Two Angels

A young woman walks through a dark alley reciting the verse of the Throne.

The man who might have harmed her later says he saw two strong men beside her. Were they angels? Fear? Conscience? The shape prayer takes when danger approaches? I don't know.

But I believe in unseen companions. Not always with wings. Sometimes an angel is a verse remembered at the right second. Sometimes an angel is the gut that tells a police officer to open a trunk. Sometimes an angel is a grandmother's warning arriving in the body before thought.

Protection is rarely cinematic while it's happening; it's a breath changing rhythm. A foot quickening. A name of God held under the tongue like a coal.

If angels come, may they stand quietly. If no angel comes, may I become one where I can. A witness. A shield. A voice in the alley saying: not her, not here, not tonight.

—

The Mist River Above the Jungle

There is a river above the Amazon, made of vapor and morning.

A man climbs into the canopy before dawn and sees it: moisture rising in golden light, macaws opening the sky, monkeys watching the strange animal in the tree, the jungle turning itself on like a green cathedral.

I have never needed proof of God to be large. Sometimes God is a mist river at sunrise. Sometimes God is the fact that water can leave the leaf without abandoning the forest.

The world is full of invisible rivers. Grief rising from crowds. Prayer rising from hospitals. Heat rising from cities. Memory rising from old songs. The dead rising from objects we thought were only objects.

To see the hidden river, one must climb before comfort wakes. One must bleed a little from branches. One must sit above the familiar floor and wait for the first light to touch what was always moving.

—

Every Meeting Is a Written Leaf

No meeting is neutral.

Some people arrive to love us. Some arrive to sharpen the boundary. Some arrive to show us what we must never become. Some don't stay, but leave a room rearranged inside the soul.

The danger is believing every connection must last to matter. The moon does not remain in the same window and still teaches the sea.

I have met strangers who changed the temperature of my life with one sentence. I have loved people whose leaving became a second education. I have held on to empty rooms because I confused pain with loyalty.

A last meeting may happen without ceremony. No thunder. No final speech. Just the universe quietly stops

arranging your paths. You keep returning to the old cafe, but the lesson has already paid its bill.

When that happens, bow inward. Thank the leaf. Do not keep reading the same line after the ink has finished.

—

Spell for Not Being Farmed

If something feeds on fear, I won't serve dinner.

If something feeds on outrage, I will not build it a kitchen in my chest. If something feeds on despair, I will keep one stubborn window open. If something feeds on obedience, I will ask who benefits from my silence.

They say the world is a farm for attention. Maybe. Look how every glowing altar asks for the harvest: watch, hate, desire, compare, panic, return. The algorithm doesn't need my blood. It needs my nervous system.

So I practice famine against the parasite. I starve the spectacle. I take my eyes back from the fire that only wants to multiply. I give attention to bread, to water, to the breathing person beside me, to the work that can be touched.

This is no small magic; attention is the coin of the soul. Spend it like a poor man who remembers the price of flour.

Attention is the coin of the soul; I won't spend it at every altar that learns my fear.

—

Metta for the Ones in Shadow

May I be filled with loving-kindness.

I say it first with suspicion. Kindness has been used to make victims quiet. Peace has been used to decorate injustice. Forgiveness has been demanded from the wounded before truth finished speaking.

So I begin carefully.

May I be safe without becoming hard.

May I be kind without becoming available to harm.

May I be peaceful without becoming obedient to cruelty.

May I be free without needing another soul to be chained.

Then I widen the circle.

May my mother be carried.

May my father be forgiven as far as truth allows.

May my daughter be where no bomb can translate her laughter into ash.

May the stranger in the enemy's uniform remember his first softness before he raises his hand.

This is difficult. Good. The strongest spells aren't the ones that flatter the ego. They are the ones that make the heart larger than its injury.

—

I Am What They Fear

I am what they fear, not because I am violent, but because I remember.

I remember the original names beneath the official language. I remember that security can become a cage, that progress can wear a predator's perfume, that a flag can be used to cover a wound it caused.

I don't rise for vengeance; vengeance is a small god with a loud drum. I rise for justice, which is heavier, slower, less glamorous, and harder to corrupt if carried with clean hands.

Falsehood breaks before a mouth that refuses decoration. Corruption trembles before records. Oppression hates the witness who cannot be purchased by comfort or frightened by exile.

I do not walk alone. I walk with the mother-name and father-name. I walk with the dead who did not become statistics. I walk with the living who still need morning.

If my voice is a candle, let it expose. If my words are a blade, let them cut only the rope.

—

Last Page Before Dawn

When the grimoire closes, do not stare at it like an idol.

Put the kettle on. Sweep the floor. Answer the child. Check on the neighbor. Fold the shirt. Wash the cup. Move

the body. Write the sentence. Tell the truth. Rest when rest is holy. Work when work is prayer.

The unseen isn't an escape from the ordinary; it's what makes the ordinary shimmer with consequence.

A word can become a world, but only if the hand helps. A prayer can become a shelter, but only if someone carries wood. A spell can become mercy, but only if it returns us to the living.

I have walked through talk of jinn, angels, simulations, black suns, archives, numbers, rivers, mothers, cards, and stars. I have found the same instruction beneath them all:

Pay attention.

Do not surrender your name.

Don't confuse power with wisdom.

Do not let fear pretend to be revelation.

Do not abandon beauty to the dark.

Don't wait for another life to become merciful in this one.

Dawn isn't proof that night was harmless. Dawn is proof that night was not final.

So I stand barefoot in the grammar of birds, with ash on one hand and bread in the other, saying to the veil:

I remember seeing enough to be humbled.

I have lost enough to be tender.

I've also feared enough to choose courage.

I have died enough in one life to know the soul is stubborn.

And if there's magic left in me, let it be this: may whatever I touch remember it was never only matter.

—

MOVEMENT IV

THE GEOMETRY OF BREATH

BOOK IX - THE GEOMETRY OF BREATH

Geometry Means Earth Measured

Geometry began, they say, with the measuring of earth.

This makes sense to me. Before a state can administer the field, somebody usually measures it. A rope across a field. A line through a village. A surveyor pretending his instrument has no politics. One man says boundary, another man says inheritance, and somewhere a grandmother discovers the path to the well has become a question she must answer at gunpoint.

So I don't romanticize measurement. A ruler can build a temple, draw a property line, or divide a people. A compass can draw a halo or a target. A square can make a room safe or make a cell efficient. The sacred and the profane often share the same tools.

Still, I love the old dream that the world contains hidden order. Not the order of police, not the order of checkpoints, not the order of men who need every living thing filed beneath their thumb. A deeper order. The order by which a seed knows how to break itself into green. The order by which a shell enlarges without forgetting its first room. The order by which the heart keeps time even while grief tries to make the body quit.

If geometry means earth measured, then holiness must mean earth measured without theft. A sacred line is one that tells the builder where to place the door so the stranger can enter. For now, A cursed line is one that tells the soldier where the child may not stand.

I take the compass into my own chest and ask: what have I measured badly? Which wound have I made larger by circling it every night? Which mercy have I drawn too small? Which dead have I turned into symbols when they wanted to remain family?

The breath answers with no diagram.

In. Out. Begin again.

—

The Compass Finds the Rib

A compass has one foot that stays and one foot that wanders.

This is the first lesson of grief. One part of me remains fixed to what was lost. One part of me must keep moving or the living will starve. If I let both feet freeze, I become a monument. If I let both feet wander, I become forgetful. The circle requires loyalty and motion.

I place the fixed point at the rib, not the skull. The mind is brilliant, but it loves to make thrones from explanations. The rib knows better. The rib protects the room where love beats without asking permission from doctrine. The

rib knows the body isn't an argument but a shelter borrowed from the elements.

Around that center I draw the first circle: my mother, my father, Mariam, Michael, Sarah, Ramallah. Around them, another: the houses that vanished, the roads that remember feet, the children whose names were too small for the headline. Around them, another: the stranger, the enemy, the one taught to fear me before he knew my face.

The circle widens until hatred turns into impractical.

Don't mistake this for innocence. I mean discipline. Mercy is not a feeling; it is geometry practiced under pressure. It is the decision to keep the center human even when history hands you a knife and calls it justice.

—

The Golden Wound

There is a proportion by which living things grow.

The leaf doesn't ask permission from the mathematician. The flower doesn't open because a theorem applauded. The body doesn't heal because the ratio is beautiful. Yet beauty keeps appearing, embarrassing the cynic, returning through fern, shell, bone, branch, galaxy, fingerprint, scar.

I have wondered whether grief has its own golden measure. Too much and the soul folds inward until the windows vanish. Too little and the dead become

decoration. The sacred proportion must be somewhere between remembering and being destroyed by memory.

I don't want a clean wound. Clean wounds belong to speeches. Mine is irregular, reddish at the edges, weather-sensitive, stubborn in winter. But even a wound can become proportionate if it teaches the living where tenderness must widen.

The old shell adds chamber after chamber, not to escape its beginning, but to survive growth. Maybe this is what maturity is: not leaving the first hurt behind, but building a larger house around it until the hurt is no longer the only room.

My dead remain in the first chamber. I don't evict them. I build around them. Breath by breath. Page by page. Cup by cup. Dawn by dawn.

One day the house may look like wisdom from the outside. Inside, it will still smell of rain and names.

—

The Spiral Does Not Escape

A circle repeats. A spiral remembers.

This is why exile is not a circle. I don't return to the same place, because the place has changed and I have changed and the dead have entered the language. But I do return. I return to the olive tree through a supermarket olive. I return to the house through a key that opens nothing. I

return to my daughter through every sleeping child whose hand remains open.

The spiral is the mercy of not being trapped at the beginning. It lets the soul pass the old point from a higher ring. There's the first grief, then the same grief after prayer, then the same grief after anger, then the same grief after forgiveness has stopped pretending to be easy.

Every revolution must learn this or it becomes only revenge with better music. Every faith must learn this or it becomes a museum of its first wound. Every person must learn this or the original pain will keep writing new laws.

I am not free because I have escaped the center.

I am freer when I can circle it without becoming its prisoner.

—

The Temple Facing Morning

Every temple faces something.

Some face the sunrise. Some face the old city. Some face a mountain, a river, a grave, a star, a direction sanctified by longing. The body is also a temple, though I distrust men who say this only to police the body. A temple isn't sacred because someone controls it; it's sacred because presence is welcomed there.

What does my body face each morning? The phone. The hunger. The memory. The unfinished sentence. The ceiling, if despair has pinned me flat. Sometimes the first spiritual act is turning the face away from the market of fear and toward a small honest light.

I have prayed facing many directions. East because the dawn came there. West because my dead seemed to be walking into evening. Down because my knees had failed. Up because the sky had not yet explained itself. Inward because God refused to be found only on maps.

The true orientation is mercy.

If I face morning but ignore the hungry, I am worshiping weather. If I face scripture but despise the stranger, I am reading a locked door. If I face the invisible but abandon the visible, my temple is badly built.

—

BOOK X - THE BODY THAT COUNTS ITSELF

The Five Gates

The five senses aren't enemies of spirit.

I've heard holy men insult the body as if God made a mistake and then asked religion to correct Him. No. The senses are gates. Dangerous, yes, as gates are dangerous. Anything can enter. Perfume, propaganda, the sound of a mother crying, the taste of bread, the sight of a child beneath dust, the touch that heals, the touch that steals.

Sight is a gate; it must learn not to become spectacle. Hearing is a gate. It must learn the difference between news and truth. Taste is a gate. It remembers the homeland through spice before politics can interrupt. Smell is a gate. It carries the dead back without passport. Touch is a gate. It is where theology either becomes tenderness or fails.

The unseen does not ask me to despise these gates. It asks me to guard them. To stop feeding the eye with terror until the soul becomes a marketplace. To stop feeding the ear with lies until cruelty sounds reasonable. To stop letting the hand forget it was made for more than grasping.

A body with guarded gates isn't closed. It is hospitable with wisdom.

—

The Heart Is the Middle Room

The mind wants the highest room.

It loves towers. It loves conclusions. It loves to sit above the city and call distance perspective. But the heart is the middle room, and all honest ascension must pass through it. Climb around the heart and you arrive with knowledge but no warmth. Climb through it and even your silence becomes useful.

I have met people full of symbols and empty of kindness. Men who could explain every seal, every angelic order, every hidden correspondence, and still could not apologize to the person they wounded. This is why I don't trust wisdom that has not learned to make tea.

The heart keeps a different arithmetic. One loaf divided among hungry mouths does not become less in the same way. A grief shared in truth becomes heavy differently. A mercy given to the undeserving does not vanish; it changes the weather inside the giver.

If the body is a temple, the heart is not decoration. It is the altar where the animal and angel stop arguing long enough to feed someone.

—

The Tree Under the Skin

There is a tree under the skin.

Roots in the heel. Trunk in the spine. Branches in the nerves. Rivers in the veins. Leaves in the fingers. Fruit in the mouth when the truth is spoken with mercy. Cut the body open and the old metaphors stop being metaphors. Everything branches. Everything seeks passage.

I don't need to choose between the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. I have eaten from both. Knowledge without life becomes a weapon. Life without knowledge becomes easy prey. The wound of this century is not that humans know too much. For now, it is that we keep separating knowing from loving.

The tree under my skin asks for balance. Too much root and I fear the sky. Too much sky and I abandon the ground. Too much fruit and I forget the season of pruning. Too much pruning and I call barrenness discipline.

Some days I stand with my hand over my chest and imagine every vein becoming a branch back toward the living. Not to escape the body. To inhabit it correctly.

—

The Ladder Learns Mercy

A ladder can become arrogance if the climber forgets the floor.

The body has its stairways: bone, breath, nerve, attention, desire, restraint, surrender. The mystic loves to name the steps. Root, river, fire, heart, throat, eye, crown. Beautiful

names. Dangerous names, if they teach a person to rank souls like floors in a hotel.

I refuse any ascension that makes me cruel to the struggling. The one trembling at the root isn't beneath me. The one who can't meditate because the rent is late isn't spiritually lazy. Hunger is loud. Trauma is loud. A siren outside the window can scatter more concentration than any demon.

So I climb slowly, and when I reach a clearer breath, I look down not with judgment but with rope.

The ladder is not for becoming superior. It is for returning with a steadier hand.

—

The Body Is a Small World

As above, so below, yes. But also: as wounded, so careful.

I remember seeing people use correspondence like a toy hammer, striking every mystery until it fits a pattern. The moon becomes mind, the sun becomes soul, the spine becomes river, the skull becomes temple, the heart becomes garden. Some of this is beautiful. Some of it is true in the way poetry is true. Some of it becomes nonsense when it forgets humility.

Still, the body is a small world. It has weather. It has borders. It has refugees: feelings exiled from speech. It has prisons: habits built around old fear. It has holy cities:

places we touch only with reverence. It has wars between appetite and wisdom. It has a sea that rises when memory pulls on the moon.

If I want peace outside me, I must study the checkpoints inside me. If I want justice outside me, I must ask where I have colonized myself with borrowed shame. If I want mercy outside me, I must stop treating my own body like occupied territory.

The small world isn't separate from the large one. It's where the large one rehearses.

—

BOOK XI - THE QUIET ARITHMETIC OF MERCY

Ratios for the Ruined House

A house can be ruined by bad proportion.

Too much wall, not enough window. Too much height, not enough foundation. Too much ornament, not enough door. A soul can be ruined the same way. Too much memory, not enough morning. Too much rage, not enough tenderness. Too much heaven, not enough bread.

I don't want balance that flatters cowardice. There are times when anger must be large, when mourning must fill the room, when the scream must be allowed to take every chair. But after the first fire, someone must ask how the house will hold the living.

This is the quiet arithmetic of mercy: how much truth can I speak without making truth a club? How much forgiveness can I practice without making forgiveness a hiding place for the offender? How much beauty can I allow while the world burns without using beauty to avoid the smoke?

No formula answers this. Only attention. Only breath counted not to escape the world, but to return to it with cleaner hands.

—

The Music Behind the Wall

The old mathematicians heard number inside music.

I hear exile inside a minor turn. I hear resurrection when the note lifts unexpectedly. I hear the body asking for harmony after years of sirens. The breath is the first instrument. Before drum, before string, before choir, there was inhale and exhale, the small bellows of the living.

War detunes a people. It teaches the nervous system a harsh scale: blast, silence, scream, report, denial, repeat. Peace must become musical before it turns into political. Not pretty. Tuned. The child must learn that the sky has notes other than threat. The mother must learn a night sound that doesn't mean run. The father must learn his own voice without humiliation in it.

Some days my prayer is only this: retune me. Not to innocence. Innocence is gone. Retune me to usefulness. Let my sorrow find the note that opens another person instead of closing me forever.

—

The Circle of One More Breath

The circle has no beginning, but the human body does.

First inhale, last exhale. Between them, a thousand smaller circles: waking and sleeping, hunger and eating, anger and apology, departure and return, grief and the strange hour when grief forgets to tighten its hand.

I don't believe eternity makes time meaningless. Eternity makes time holy. If the soul is larger than the body, then every moment in the body becomes more tender, not less. The temporary cup matters because the water is real. The mortal face matters because love learned that exact shape.

So I practice the circle of one more breath. When panic comes, one more. When hatred offers me a crown, one more. When despair says the story is finished, one more. When beauty comes and I fear losing it, one more. Not as denial. As participation.

To breathe once more is to vote with the body for continuation.

—

The Hidden Order Does Not Excuse the Visible Crime

This must be said before beauty becomes an alibi.

The hidden order doesn't excuse the visible crime. A sacred pattern in the shell does not make hunger holy. A correspondence between star and body does not make the bomb a lesson. A child under rubble is not a metaphor sent to awaken my consciousness. He is a child under rubble. Dig first. Interpret later, if interpretation survives shame.

I lose patience with spirituality that turns suffering into decoration. The unseen must answer to the wounded. The symbol must kneel before the body. The mystic who cannot bring water has misunderstood the river.

Yes, there may be geometry beneath creation. Yes, breath may be spirit wearing motion. Yes, the body may be a temple and death may be a door. But none of this releases me from the ordinary commandments: feed, shelter, witness, repair, protect, refuse the lie.

If wisdom does not make me more responsible to the visible world, it is only smoke in a costume.

—

Last Instruction of the Measured Breath

When I have counted the circles, folded the stars, listened to the numbers, studied the body, faced the morning, watched the spiral, guarded the gates, and placed my hand on the middle room, what stays?

A person at the door.

Always, a person at the door.

The unseen sends me back to the seen with humiliating consistency. I want revelation; it gives me a neighbor. I want ascension; it gives me dishes. I want the architecture of heaven; it gives me a phone call I have avoided. I want the secret name of God; it gives me the name of someone I haven't forgiven.

So let the final instruction be measured and simple.

Breathe before speaking. Breathe before judging. Breathe before entering the old wound with dirty shoes. Breathe before calling fear prophecy. Breathe before turning

knowledge into a crown. Breathe before mistaking the symbol for the soul.

Then act.

Because breath that never becomes mercy is only air passing through a beautiful instrument no one learned to play.

Breath is rehearsal. Mercy is the performance.

—

MOVEMENT V

THE WHITE WORK

The Clean Page

I have read enough of the dark shelves to know that darkness often comes wearing scholarship.

It comes bound in red, black, hide, rumor, monk-script, planetary hour, old alphabet, bright warning. It says: here are the names. Here are the keys. Here is how a man may command what he has not learned to love.

I don't come to those pages hungry for power. Power has already ruined too many rooms in my life. I've seen men with guns command bodies. I've also watched ministers command grief to become quiet. I remember seeing empires command language until a child turned into collateral.

So I open the old book differently.

I don't ask: What can I summon? I ask: What must I purify in myself before the unseen trusts my breath?

I don't ask: Which name bends the spirit? I ask: Which name bends my cruelty until it breaks?

The clean page after the old books is not blank. It is washed. It remembers the ink, but refuses the wound. It takes the knife out of the ritual and leaves the hand. It takes the throne out of the circle and leaves attention.

This is the grimoire I can live with: no pact except with mercy, no seal except against harm, no miracle except the human becoming less hungry to dominate another human.

—

Seven Laws for a Bruised Spirit

The old teachers loved seven.

Seven colors bending through one hidden white. Seven days circling the week like beads through fingers. Seven openings in the head. Seven notes climbing the throat. Seven steps between panic and prayer if the breath is patient enough to count them.

So let there be seven laws for the bruised spirit.

First: the mind is a room, but not every voice inside it's king.

Second: what is above must answer to what is below. A heaven that does not feed the hungry is only architecture.

Third: everything moves. Even grief. Even exile. Even the name I thought had frozen in my mouth.

Fourth: every wound has an opposite, but the opposite isn't denial. The opposite of grief isn't laughter; it's grief loved all the way into meaning.

Fifth: the tide returns. Panic rises, panic falls. Empires rise, empires fall. The soul must learn not to worship either wave.

Sixth: nothing is without consequence. A word enters the body. A silence enters the body. A kindness enters the body. A cruelty echoes through rooms where the cruel will never sit.

Seventh: creation has two hands. Firmness and tenderness. Judgment and mercy. Bread and boundary. To live only in one hand is to become half-made.

I write these laws on the inside of the rib, where paper can't be burned.

—

The Circle Where Nothing Is Commanded

The circle is older than command.

Before men drew it to trap spirits, the moon drew it on water. Before magicians scratched it on floors, children drew it around games. Before any king made a border, the eye opened as a circle and received the world without owning it.

So I draw a circle and refuse to turn it into a prison.

No spirit is dragged here; no hidden thing is threatened. No angel is flattered into service. No darkness is bribed with my fear.

Inside this circle, I place a bowl of clean water, a heel of bread, a name I have harmed, a name that harmed me, and the breath I still pretend belongs only to me.

Then I stand outside the hunger to control.

This is harder than summoning.

Command is easy when the heart is frightened. Mercy is difficult because it can't be faked for long. The circle knows; it has no corners where my arrogance can hide.

If anything appears, let it be conscience. If anything speaks, let it ask me whom I have failed to feed. If anything trembles, let it be the old throne inside me losing its legs.

The strongest circle isn't the one that traps a spirit. It's the one that keeps my hunger to control from entering the room.

—

The Key That Opens Inward

Every old key promises a door.

A brass key. A bone key. A letter-key. A name-key. A planetary key. A key hidden inside the mouth of a psalm. A key drawn in a manuscript by a hand that feared its own imagination.

But I have learned the most dangerous doors open inward.

The door to resentment. The door to revenge. The door to the room where I keep every insult polished. The door to the small courtroom where I am always innocent and every enemy is always made of one color.

What if the true key does not open the vault of power, but the locked room where tenderness has been kept under suspicion?

What if the key isn't a word at all, but an act repeated until the body believes it?

Forgive once, not because they earned it, but because poison is expensive. Tell the truth once, not because the world rewards it, but because the tongue was not born to be a hired guard for fear. Feed once, even if the bowl is small.

This is the inward key: the soul turning in its own door and discovering that freedom starts as a sound only the hinge can hear.

—

The Square of Mercy

There are squares made of numbers, squares made of letters, squares made to hold an intention so tightly that even the invisible begins to feel arranged.

I don't mock the old mathematics. A mother arranging medicine by hour is also making a square. A mason laying stone on stone is also praying in geometry. A child folding a paper crane is also asking the universe to become precise with hope.

But I won't make a square for domination.

I make a square of mercy.

In the first corner: protection for the child.

In the second: bread for the hungry.

In the third: courage for the witness.

In the fourth: restraint for the powerful.

At the center: a silence where God may enter without being managed by my need.

This is enough. Four corners, one breath. A small architecture against despair.

If the old squares once promised influence over kings, let this one influence my hand when I am tired, my mouth when it wants to wound, my feet when they want to walk past suffering and call it peace.

—

Forty Mornings of Unlearning Control

Some wisdom asks for retreat.

Not escape. Not holiness performed for mirrors. Retreat: the room where the self loses its audience and must finally speak honestly.

For forty mornings I imagine myself rising before the world can sell me its appetite. I wash my face. I open the window. I breathe until the animal inside me stops running from a danger that is no longer in the room.

On the first morning, I renounce harm.

On the second, I renounce spectacle.

On the third, I renounce the sweetness of being right while another human is still bleeding.

By the tenth, I discover that purity is not clean hands. Purity is hands willing to become useful.

By the twentieth, I discover that an angel doesn't visit a heart full of commands. It visits a heart that has made space.

By the fortieth, no trumpet. No wing. No fire writing my name across the ceiling.

Only the kettle. Only the street. Only the old instruction returning with unbearable simplicity:

Be gentle, and begin.

—

Knowledge and Conversation

I used to think revelation would arrive like thunder.

A voice from above. A blade of brightness. A sentence with the authority to end all my questions.

Now I suspect the holiest knowledge comes as conversation.

Not command. Conversation.

The guardian within me doesn't shout over the wound. It sits beside the wound and waits until I stop performing strength. It asks one question at a time.

Why do you call despair wisdom?

Why do you keep returning to the room where you were destroyed, as if the floor owes you an apology?

Why do you fear joy, when joy has never asked you to forget the dead?

This is knowledge: not information stacked high enough to become a tower, but a voice that knows where the lie lives and speaks to it without hatred.

This is conversation: the soul answering back, sometimes with tears, sometimes with silence, sometimes by finally doing the small good thing it avoided.

—

The Guardian Does Not Shout

The guardian doesn't shout because shouting belongs to fear.

It doesn't flatter me. It doesn't call me chosen above the neighbor. It doesn't promise that my suffering made me pure. For me, it knows suffering can make a person cruel if the wound is crowned too early.

The guardian says: lower your voice near grief.

The guardian says: return the borrowed tenderness.

The guardian says: don't build theology from your panic.

Some call it angel. Some call it higher self. Some call it conscience. Some call it the clean portion of the heart that refuses to become a weapon.

I don't care what name survives the argument.

I know the guardian by its fruit.

After it speaks, I don't feel larger than others. I feel responsible to them. After it speaks, the enemy turns into more human, not less. After it speaks, the miracle I want for myself becomes impossible to separate from the mercy I owe the world.

—

The Red Book Refuses My Signature

There's always a red book somewhere in the story.

A promise of quick power. A contract with the thing beneath the thing. A signature requested at the hour

when grief has made a man reckless and loneliness has made him willing to pay with tomorrow.

I have known that hour.

I have wanted the dead returned so badly I would have listened to any voice with a doorway in it.

But the red book refuses my signature now because I have learned the cost of bargains made from panic. Nothing holy asks me to become less human in exchange for feeling less pain. Nothing clean asks for another person as collateral.

So I write instead:

I don't trade my mercy for control.

I don't trade my grief for revenge.

I don't trade my name for a throne over invisible servants.

Let the book close. Let the ink dry unused. Let the only contract be this: while I breathe, I won't become what harmed me.

—

The Pact I Break

The first pact was not made with a horned thing.

It was made with bitterness.

It said: keep me close and I will protect you. I will make you sharp. I will make sure no one enters the room without bleeding first.

The second pact was made with despair.

It said: expect nothing and you will never be disappointed. Call your closed heart wisdom. Call your isolation clarity.

The third pact was made with the story that pain is proof of innocence.

That one was the most dangerous.

Today I break them.

Not with smoke. Not with theatre. Not by pretending the wound was smaller than it was.

I break them by feeding someone. I break them by answering a child gently. I break them by telling the truth without turning truth into a blade for my ego. I break them by letting hope enter without checking its papers at the door.

Every broken pact comes back a little breath to the body.

—

BOOK XIV - BINARY HOPE

Zero and One

The machine says zero and one.

Off and on. No and yes. Absence and presence. The smallest alphabet of electricity.

The mystic smiles. We have always lived inside binaries pretending to be enemies: night and morning, wound and witness, body and breath, fear and courage, death and the door after death.

But I am not interested in the binary that flattens the soul. I don't want a world where everyone is forced into two boxes and told to choose a cage.

I want the binary of moral clarity at the moment of harm.

Feed or don't feed.

Shelter or don't shelter.

Tell the truth or polish the lie.

Open the gate or decorate the prison.

This is binary hope: the clean yes that enters the body after the clean no has refused cruelty.

No, I won't harm.

Yes, I will repair.

—

The Two Doors at the End of Harm

At the end of harm, there are two doors.

One opens into imitation. Behind it, the wounded become architects of new wounds. They study the hand that struck them and learn its grip. They call revenge balance. They call hardness maturity. They call the disappearance of tenderness survival.

The other door opens into transmutation.

Not forgetfulness. Not surrender. Not the cheap peace that asks the injured to become quiet so the comfortable may sleep.

Transmutation is the older fire: grief becoming witness, rage becoming boundary, memory becoming bread for those still walking.

I stand between the doors often.

Some days I still hear my old pain knocking from the first room, promising me the bitter relief of becoming untouchable.

But I choose the second door whenever I can.

Not because I am pure.

Because I've seen what the first door builds, and I refuse to spend my life decorating another cage.

—

As Above, So Feed Below

As above, so below, they say.

Fine.

Then if heaven is merciful, the kitchen must be merciful.

If the stars are arranged with hidden order, the refugee line must not be arranged with hidden contempt.

If the sacred circle is beautiful, so must be the table where the stranger isn't questioned before eating.

I am tired of vertical spirituality that rises too quickly past the neighbor.

Don't tell me about spheres while the child has no shoes. Don't tell me about divine proportion while the hospital bed is shared by three bodies. Don't tell me about cosmic balance while your worker can't afford bread.

Bring the above down.

Let correspondence become responsibility.

Let the invisible order prove itself by making the visible world less cruel.

—

Vibration After the Siren

Everything vibrates, yes.

But say that carefully in a city after sirens.

Don't tell the traumatized child to raise his frequency while the aircraft still circles. Don't tell the grieving mother her sorrow is low vibration, as if love should be ashamed of how deeply it entered the body.

There's a vibration in mourning that's holier than the false cheer of those who can't bear witness.

The question isn't how to escape the low note; it's how to let the low note become part of a song that does not end in hatred.

A cello knows this. A throat knows this; the earth after rain knows this.

The lower string doesn't need to pretend it is a bell. It needs to be tuned, held, drawn across with patience until sorrow becomes resonance.

After the siren, I don't ask my body to glow. I ask it to stay. I ask it to breathe. I ask it to remember that even a broken room has acoustics.

—

The Miracle Does Not Perform

The miracle doesn't always perform.

It does not always open a sea where cameras can applaud. It does not always put fire in the sky or wings in the hallway.

Sometimes the miracle is binary and small.

The hand opens instead of striking.

The mouth tells the truth instead of saving face.

The man who wanted to vanish waits one more hour.

The child eats.

The border guard remembers his mother.

The tired nurse finds another vein.

The widow laughs once and doesn't apologize for it.

A miracle that does not perform may still save the world more honestly than spectacle. It enters quietly, repairs one hinge, returns one breath, and leaves without asking for worship.

—

BOOK XV - THE MIRACLE FIELD

The Giant Page Turns

There is a legend of a giant book, too heavy for one frightened century to carry.

On one page, darkness painted itself large enough to frighten the monks. On another, a city of heaven waited in colored patience. Between them: laws, histories, medicine, confession, calendar, the human attempt to gather the whole world into binding.

I know this desire.

After loss, I too wanted a book large enough to hold everything: my father, my mother, Michael, Mariam, Sarah, Ramallah, the rooms undone by fire, the countries that learned to speak in sirens, the God I kept accusing and needing.

But the giant page turns.

Darkness doesn't get the final illumination. The page that frightens us is only one opening in a book too large for despair to own.

Somewhere after the monster, there must be an herb. Somewhere after the sentence, a remedy. Somewhere after the image, a hand still copying the world carefully so it doesn't disappear.

I place my palm on the page and say: turn.

—

Names Washed of Their Teeth

There are names in the old books that arrive with teeth.

Names for fear. Names for appetite. Names for the impulse that wants another person smaller. Names for the lie that says domination is knowledge.

I won't feed those names.

I wash them until they become warnings instead of doors.

Every demon becomes a diagnosis. Every monster becomes a map of human hunger. Every forbidden seal becomes a question: where does this live in me, and how do I stop giving it shelter?

Greed has a name. So does envy. So does the desire to be obeyed. So does the pleasure of watching an enemy suffer. So does the laziness that calls itself neutrality while someone is being crushed.

When a name is washed of its teeth, it can no longer bite. It can only teach.

This is how I read the darkness now: not as a menu, but as a mirror I refuse to worship.

—

The Angel in the Bread Line

If angels are real, I have likely missed them.

I looked for wings and found only elbows in a bread line. I looked for halos and found a woman holding a place for a stranger. I looked for a voice from heaven and heard a baker say, take the larger piece for the child.

The old grimoires made angels sound like royal officials: names, ranks, seals, jurisdictions, proper hours of approach.

Maybe.

The angel I trust most is the one that makes my hand useful.

It does not care whether I pronounce the ancient syllable correctly if I can't pronounce my neighbor's grief with tenderness. It does not descend to decorate my loneliness. It descends as the sudden courage to do the unglamorous good.

The angel in the bread line is not above us.

It moves between us whenever hunger fails to make us selfish.

—

The Last Seal Is a Window

A seal can close. A seal can protect. A seal can announce that what is inside has been witnessed and must not be tampered with by careless hands.

But the last seal is a window.

I say this because I am tired of sacred knowledge becoming another locked room.

If wisdom can't become air for the suffering, let it remain unread. If mystery can't make the powerful tremble before the weak, let the mystery go back to silence. If the hidden name can't help me love the visible child, I don't need it.

The last seal opens outward.

It lets the room breathe. It lets the old book admit morning. It lets the frightened reader see that the purpose of hidden knowledge was never to become special.

The purpose was to become responsible.

I break the seal only by becoming less dangerous to what is tender.

—

The Breath Chooses the Human

In the end, the breath chooses the human.

Not the magician. Not the master. Not the man with a room full of seals and no mercy. Not the one who knows the secret alphabet but can't apologize.

The breath chooses the human who remains soft after evidence. The human who can read the dark book and not become darkened by hunger. The human who can stand before power and still bend down to tie a child's shoe.

I have no interest in a miracle that lifts me above the grieving.

Let the miracle place me among them with cleaner hands.

And let purity mean: no people taught as objects of hatred, no prayer turned into a target, no child made symbol before being held as child.

Let hope be binary when the hour demands it:

No to harm.

Yes to repair.

No to domination.

Yes to bread.

No to the throne inside the wound.

Yes to the breath that returns and returns and returns, asking only this:

Will you use your life to become more alive?

—

MOVEMENT VI

THE CLEAN TRANSMISSION

BOOK XVI - THE SEVEN CLEAN LAWS

The World Is Mind, But the Child Still Needs Milk

They say the world begins in mind.

I believe them carefully. A thought can become a road. A road can become a convoy. A convoy can become aid or empire depending on the hand that blesses it. Nobody should be casual with thought. Thought is the first border and the first bridge.

But I lose patience with a mysticism that makes hunger abstract. If the universe is mental, then the starving child is not less real. He is the mind of God asking why theology did not become breakfast.

So I train the mind like a room before guests arrive. Sweep envy. Open a window. Remove the chair where hatred keeps sitting. But after the mind is cleaned, I go to the kitchen. Wisdom that doesn't feed anyone is only smoke practicing vocabulary.

—

Correspondence, or the Bruise Above and Below

As above, so below, yes. But let the saying come down from the ceiling and look at the bruise on the arm.

If the government lies above, the child learns fear below. If the priest hardens above, the prayer stiffens below. If the

father is humiliated at the checkpoint, the boy stores thunder in his ribs. At least here, heaven and earth are always writing to one another through the body.

I no longer use correspondence to escape the world. I use it to repair the chain. If I want peace in the nation, let me stop declaring war in the room. If I want mercy in history, let me practice it on the face in front of me. If I want the unseen to open, let the visible become less cruel.

The highest map is useless if the lowest door remains locked against the poor.

—

The Vibrating Wound

Nothing rests. Even sorrow moves.

A siren enters the body and keeps circling for years. A mother hears one aircraft and becomes twenty-seven again. A man leaves the camp but the camp keeps a small radio inside his nervous system. This too is vibration: memory moving after the event has put on a date and pretended to be over.

So I ask what frequency my grief is teaching the room. Not so I can shame it; grief has earned its sound. But I don't want my wound to become the only instrument my daughter ever hears.

I lower my breath. I place water near the bed. I let the heart remember its older rhythm. The miracle isn't that

pain stops moving; it's that pain learns to move toward mercy.

—

The Pole Turns in the Hand

Every force has two ends.

Fear can become caution or cruelty; fire can cook bread or burn the house. A name can bless a child or mark him for suspicion. Even memory, holy memory, can become a door or a blade.

I've watched the wounded become prophets and tyrants. The difference isn't the wound; it's where the wound is pointed.

So I hold the pole with both hands and turn it slowly. Hatred toward protection. Shame toward tenderness. Rage toward witness. Longing toward prayer. I don't erase the charge. I change the direction.

This is alchemy without theatre: the heart refusing to use its pain as permission to harm.

—

Rhythm for Those Who Thought the Night Was Permanent

The sea has never once apologized for returning.

It leaves. It comes. It leaves. It arrives. The chest learns the same scripture. Inhale. Exhale. Grief. Grace. Winter. Fig.

Bomb. Bread. Burial. Birth. No empire has managed to interrupt the tide forever.

Rhythm doesn't make suffering acceptable. It makes survival possible. It tells the soul that the present weather is not the entire climate of God.

When I can't believe in dawn, I believe in the next breath. When I cannot believe in justice, I believe in one more hand passing one more bowl. A rhythm is a rope thrown across despair. Hold it. Pull gently. Morning is shy with the ruined, but it still comes.

—

Cause, Consequence, and the Unforgiving Verb

Nothing happens alone.

A headline prepares a policy. A policy prepares a raid. A raid prepares a coffin. A coffin prepares a boy for either madness or mercy. Every effect comes carrying the fingerprints of causes that wanted to remain invisible.

So I distrust passive voice. It is bad grammar and worse theology. Bodies were not simply found. A road didn't simply close. A city did not simply starve. Somewhere a hand signed, a mouth justified, a bank processed, a camera softened, a citizen looked away.

But consequence can be holy too; A kindness turns into courage. Courage becomes a street. A street becomes a

law. A law becomes a child sleeping without studying the sky.

Causation is not only accusation. It is invitation. Begin a better chain.

—

The Two Hands of Creation

The old language loved masculine and feminine, sun and moon, sword and cup, command and reception. I understand the grammar, but I won't let it become a cage for the living.

Creation needs difference, yes. But difference isn't hierarchy. The right hand doesn't own the left. The day doesn't shame the night. The river doesn't become less holy because it receives the rain.

In me there's a hand that acts and a hand that listens. A voice that speaks and a silence that carries. A fire that rises and a water that remembers. When one tries to rule the other, I become war. When they meet, I become human.

Let the two hands of creation wash each other. Let strength learn gentleness. Let tenderness learn a spine. Let the soul be whole without making half of itself kneel.

—

BOOK XVII - THE CLEAN CIRCLE

The Circle Is for Keeping Harm Out

The first circle wasn't drawn to trap a spirit.

It was drawn by a mother around a sleeping child. It was the arm, the blanket, the doorway watched through the night. It was the sentence: not this one. Not here. Not while I am breathing.

Later men drew circles with knives in their voices. They stood inside chalk and shouted at the invisible as if domination were wisdom. I remember seeing enough domination to know it is never holy, even when it wears sacred letters.

So my circle is simple. No hatred enters. No inherited lie enters. No spirit of revenge enters. No glamour of power enters. If grief enters, it must sit down and tell the truth. If anger enters, it must wash its hands before touching the children.

Protection isn't control; it's love with a boundary.

—

The Seal That Refuses Chains

A seal can close a letter; A seal can protect a threshold. A seal can say: this has been witnessed; don't tamper with it.

But a seal can also become a chain when the hand that draws it loves power more than peace. There are men who want to bind everything: spirits, women, workers, countries, memory, God. They call the binding order because order sounds cleaner than fear.

I redraw the seal as a promise. May my mouth be sealed against slander. May my hand be sealed against cruelty. May my home be sealed against despair that comes disguised as certainty. May the vulnerable be sealed into safety, not silence.

The only thing I wish to bind is my own impulse to become what harmed me.

—

The Name Must Wash Its Mouth

A divine name isn't a tool. It's a fire placed inside language.

I've heard holy names used to bless bombs, shame bodies, crown thieves, frighten children, and silence mothers. Every time, the name darkened in the mouth that carried it. Not because God was harmed. God can't be scratched by our small knives. The harm was in us. We became smaller each time we used the Infinite to excuse a failure of love.

Before I speak a holy name, let my mouth wash itself in humility. Let the name leave me more tender than it

found me. Let it not become a password for superiority.
Let it become bread, patience, apology, courage, return.
If a name of God doesn't make me safer for the wounded,
I haven't spoken it. I have only made noise near the altar.

—

BOOK XVIII - THE ANGEL AFTER THE RED DOOR

The Long Retreat

Some operations can't be rushed.

The soul isn't a vending machine. God isn't an emergency lever for men who avoided silence until power became useful. If there's a guardian within or above me, let me become quiet enough not to mistake every echo for its voice.

The long retreat doesn't have to be a desert monastery. It may be forty mornings of not lying. Six months of eating without worshipping hunger. A year of refusing the cheap anger. A season of speaking to the dead without asking them to perform.

Purity isn't disgust for the body; it's motive made clean. The hand can be washed and still be cruel. The room can be swept and still be proud. I ask for the harder washing: remove from me the need to be obeyed.

—

Knowledge and Conversation Without Thunder

I used to think the guardian would arrive with wings large enough to disturb furniture.

Now I think the truest messenger may sound like the sentence I keep avoiding: forgive him. Call her. Eat. Stop

rehearsing the injury. Tell the truth before the body turns it into illness. Put the money where the mouth has been praying.

Knowledge isn't possession. Conversation isn't command. To speak with the holy is to become responsible for what the holy reveals.

If an angel ever answers me, I pray it does not flatter my importance. I pray it gives me an errand small enough to prove I was listening.

—

The Red Contract Burns

There's always a red door in the story.

Behind it: treasure without labor, power without accountability, love without patience, victory without mourning, safety purchased with someone else's throat. The contract waits with a polite pen. Maybe it says sign here and I will make the ache stop.

I have signed such papers without ink. I signed with despair when I believed nothing could change. I signed with pride when I thought suffering made me innocent. I signed with silence when it was easier to be liked than truthful.

Tonight I burn the contract. Not dramatically. I don't need an audience for repentance. I place it in the small fire of the heart and let the smoke carry back what was

never mine: domination, revenge, the fantasy of being untouchable.

What remains isn't weakness. It's freedom with its hands empty enough to bless.

The ache may remain. The contract does not.

—

The Giant Book Kneels

I imagine a giant book laid open on the floor of history.

On one page, the beast men feared to look at. On the facing page, a city of light. Between them, the spine of a manuscript so large it seems to have swallowed a lifetime. The lesson is not that darkness is equal to heaven. The lesson is that the human soul keeps binding them into the same volume and calling the binding memory.

Every person carries such a book. One page shows what hurt us. One page shows what could heal us. If we tear out the dark page, we become naive. If we worship it, we become cruel.

So I ask the giant book to kneel. Become not spectacle, but confession. Become not fear, but warning. Let the image of the monster teach me to recognize the smaller monster when it asks to use my mouth.

—

The Four Watchmen Become Nurses

The old maps placed powers at the directions: east, west, north, south. Each gate had a watcher. Each wind carried temperament. Each quarter of the sky was given a name and a task.

I don't call watchmen to rule the room. I ask the directions to learn tenderness.

East, guard the beginning. Keep cynicism from killing the first small yes. South, guard the fire. Make it warm without letting it become war. West, guard the grief. Let the dead be remembered without chaining the living to the grave. North, guard the body. Give bread, blankets, medicine, and the stubborn courage of winter roots.

If the world must have watchmen, let them become nurses. Let every gate ask not who deserves entry, but who needs care.

—

The Binary Miracle

Zero and one.

The machine says no and yes. Off and on. Absent and present. The mystic laughs because the machine has rediscovered an old altar: every life keeps standing before two doors.

I can answer harm with harm or answer harm with interruption. I can let grief rot or let it ripen. I can

become a mouth for the empire that wounded me or a hand for the child beside me. Zero. One. Refusal. Beginning.

Binary hope isn't simplistic. It is the first clean decision after chaos: I won't add darkness. I will not feed the thing that fed on me. I will become the switch by which one room receives light.

A miracle often starts as one human being choosing one better thing in one wounded minute.

—

The Final Operation Is Kindness

At the end of all hidden study, after the diagrams, after the seals, after the frightening names, after the beautiful numbers, after the circles and squares and long nights of breath, the operation turns into embarrassingly plain.

Be kind.

Not soft. Kindness isn't softness. Kindness has buried children and still refuses to become a butcher. Kindness names the crime and still refuses to turn a whole people into the crime. Kindness stands at the border with documents, water, witnesses, lawyers, songs, and a fury clean enough to heal.

If wisdom can't kneel beside pain, it is not wisdom. If purity cannot enter the camp, it is vanity. If miracle cannot become bread, it is performance.

So I close the hidden book and open my hand. The breath enters. The breath leaves. Between the two, there is just enough time to do good.

—

BOOK XIX - THE CLEAN TRANSMISSION

The Tongue Learns to Bless the Cup

I've seen words used as bullets.

I've seen a headline enter a house before the soldiers did.

I remember seeing a name mispronounced until the person carrying it began to apologize for existing.

So when the old teachers say words aren't only sound, I believe them carefully.

Not because every syllable is a superstition.

Because every syllable is a hand.

A hand may lift a child, or strike him.

A hand may pass bread, or sign the order that withholds it.

The mouth is the smallest workshop of history.

In it, the invisible is given bone.

I place a cup of water on the table.

I don't command it.

I do not pretend the water owes me a miracle.

I only speak above it the words I wish had been spoken over me:

Be safe.

Be remembered.

Be more than what harmed you.

Then I drink.

Not to change the universe by force.

To let my own body hear me choosing tenderness.

—

Cymatic Mercy

Sound has always wanted a body.

Strike the drum and the chest answers.

Speak gently and the frightened dog comes closer.

Cry in a room and even the walls seem to lean forward.

There are patterns that appear when vibration touches matter.

Powder gathers into hidden flowers.

Water trembles into temporary geometry.

The throat gives shape to what the heart has survived.

So I fear chants that make men less human.

So I trust songs that return a body to itself.

A cruel rhythm can make a crowd forget the face in front of it.

A merciful rhythm can remind a village how to breathe together.

So I ask my poems a question before I release them:

What pattern will you leave in the listener?

If the answer is hatred, I tear the page.

—

The Star Hidden in Start

The mystics love to open words like fruit.

Sometimes they find sweetness.

Sometimes only the knife admiring itself.

I am careful.

Not every coincidence is a scripture.

Not every echo is God.

Still, language has trapdoors.

Star inside start.

Ear inside heart.

One inside alone if the wound is read badly.

A name can carry an ancestor like a match in the pocket.

A word can remember a road its speaker forgot.

My own breath enters English and Arabic differently.

One language opens like a window.

One language kneels.

One language keeps my dead closer to the tongue.

I don't use etymology to prove myself chosen.

I use it to remain humble before the old migrations of sound.

Every word is a refugee from an earlier mouth.

—

The Mirror of Zero and One

The machine learned two numbers and built a world from them.

Zero.

One.

No.

Yes.

Empty.

Present.

The ancient sages did not need wires to understand polarity.

They watched day answer night.

They watched inhale make a promise to exhale.

They watched a seed disappear before becoming evidence.

But the soul isn't a machine.

A human being isn't only zero or one.

We are the trembling space between them.

The pause before forgiveness.

The hesitation before revenge.

The hand half-open after years of being a fist.

Binary hope is not simple hope.

It's the holy discipline of choosing again.

One: feed.

Zero: refuse the cruelty.

One: tell the truth.

Zero: don't become the lie.

—

The Body Is Not a Temple for Fear

The body remembers what the mind calls finished.

A siren can live in the shoulders.

A checkpoint can remain in the stomach.

A father's death can become weather behind the eyes.

That's why healing cannot only be an idea.

The breath must be invited back into the room.

The jaw must learn it isn't holding a secret grenade.

The hands must be told they are allowed to rest.

The spine must stop waiting for the next command.

I don't cleanse the body because the body is dirty.

I cleanse it because fear has been camping there without paying rent.

I wash the face.

I unclench the tongue.

I breathe until the ribs remember they are gates, not bars.

The temple isn't holy because it's untouched.

The temple is holy because it keeps opening after invasion.

—

BOOK XX - THE MERCY OF HIDDEN ORDER

The Labyrinth That Walks Me Home

A maze asks me to be clever.

A labyrinth asks me to continue.

This is the difference between trick and initiation.

I have spent years inside a grief with no visible exit.

It turned left.

It turned right.

It brought me near the center, then carried me away from it.

I called this cruelty until I understood the path was teaching my body to trust return.

The center is not a trophy.

The center is where the soul removes its shoes.

I don't rush there now.

I walk the ring of ordinary days.

Kettle.

Window.

Neighbor.

Prayer.

Bread.

Back again.

Every turn says:

You aren't lost.

You are being unwound.

—

The Square Written for Bread

There are squares made for domination.

Let mine be made for bread.

Four sides.

Four directions.

Four corners of a table where strangers stop rehearsing suspicion.

In the first corner: the hungry.

In the second: the ashamed.

In the third: the one who has too much and can't sleep.

In the fourth: the child who has not yet learned which people he is supposed to fear.

Across the center I write no secret name.

I write:

eat.

I write:

stay.

I write:

Your life isn't an argument.

If the rows must add to one number, let the number be enough.

Enough water.

Enough shelter.

Enough mercy for the day.

—

The Circle of Four Winds

The east brings morning and asks what I will begin.

The west brings evening and asks what I will release.

The north brings bone and asks what must remain standing.

The south brings heat and asks what must be softened before it burns.

I stand at the center, not as master.

As witness.

The old circles were often drawn to command what didn't consent.

Mine is drawn to keep harm outside while the wounded breathe.

Let no spirit enter that feeds on despair.

And let no ideology enter that needs a child to vanish.

Let no voice enter that calls cruelty wisdom.

Let the four winds carry only what can sit beside grief without exploiting it.

Then the circle opens.

Not because danger is gone.

Because fear is no longer priest.

—

The Giant Book Without the Monster

There's always a giant book in the imagination of frightened people.

A book large enough to hold law, medicine, history, prayer, sin, miracle, punishment, and the face of the thing we are told to fear.

I understand why the mind paints a monster on the page.

It wants one shape for the dread.

One body for every unnamed terror.

But if I turn the page with mercy, the monster becomes smaller.

Behind it are recipes for healing.

Chronicles of people trying to remember themselves.

Prayers written by hands that shook as badly as mine.

A calendar of dead brothers.

A record that says even fear wants to be archived so it can stop ruling the room.

I do not tear out the dark page.

I place it opposite the city of light and say:

You aren't the whole book.

—

The Ladder Does Not End in Escape

Every ladder tempts the wounded to leave.

Leave the body.

Leave the grief.

Leave the poor world with its sirens and invoices.

I have wanted that.

I have wanted spirit without rent, heaven without paperwork, God without the neighbor knocking.

But the clean ladder doesn't end in escape.

It ends in return.

Upward for vision.

Downward for service.

Upward to remember the soul.

Downward to wash the cup.

Upward to hear the guardian.

Downward to apologize before pride edits the sentence.

Any ascent that makes me less useful to the suffering is only vanity with wings.

—

BOOK XXI - THE BREATH AFTER THE TRANSCRIPT

The Archive of Voices Becomes Weather

A transcript is a strange afterlife.

The voice is gone, but the mouth remains in black marks.

Laughter turns into punctuation.

Hesitation becomes bracket.

A cough becomes nothing unless someone loved the throat that made it.

I read these fragments carefully.

Not to steal their clothes.

Not to dress my grief in another man's certainty.

I read for weather.

Where does the wind repeat?

Where does the same fear return wearing different shoes?

Where does the soul ask, again and again, whether this world is only surface?

Then I close the file.

I let the language dissolve.

Only the rain remains.

And from the rain, I write in my own hand.

—

The Miracle Must Survive Translation

Miracle is a word that has been overworked.

It is asked to perform at funerals.

It is dragged onto stages.

It's sold to the desperate with shipping included.

But the miracle I trust is quieter.

A boy who was taught to hate learning to ask a better question.

A woman who lost everything still refusing to make cruelty her inheritance.

A survivor touching his own chest and saying:

I am still here, and I will not become a weapon.

If hidden wisdom can't produce that, let it remain hidden.

If a ritual can't make me kinder to the next breathing body, let the ritual fail.

If a spirit can't teach mercy, I won't call it high.

Let the miracle survive translation into bread.

Into rent paid.

Into medicine found.

Into a phone call answered before despair becomes permanent.

—

The Grammar of Hope

Hope isn't a mood.
It is a grammar.

It has verbs:
feed,
return,
listen,
repair.

It has nouns:
bread,
hand,
window,
neighbor,
name.

It has punctuation:
the pause before anger becomes useful,
the comma between grief and revenge,
the period after enough.

Hope has no interest in decoration.
Hope does not float above the room saying light.
Hope washes the cup.
Hope calls the doctor.
Hope learns the bus schedule.
Hope brings the body back from the beautiful idea
and says:
Eat first.
Then prophesy.

Despair also has grammar.
It repeats.
It capitalizes always and never.
It removes the future tense.
It makes the sentence kneel before the wound.

So I practice another language.
Not optimism.
Not denial either.
Not the pink sugar of easy comfort.

A harder grammar.
A grammar with dirt beneath the nails.
A grammar that can say fire
without worshipping the ash.

Today I conjugate mercy:
I stay.
You breathe.
We begin again.

Song for the Breath That Would Not Leave

Verse 1

I carried a storm in the back of my teeth,

I carried a house that had fallen beneath

The names of the living, the names of the gone,

The night with its boot on the throat of the dawn.

Pre-Chorus

But something kept moving,

Small as a thread,

Not loud as an angel,

Not finished, not dead.

Chorus

Breath, stay with me.

Breath, carry me through.

If the world breaks the mirror,

Make the broken shine true.

Breath, witness me.

Breath, teach me to stand.

I am more than the wound

And still made of the hand.

Verse II

I found a small mercy asleep by the door,

I fed it with water and asked it for more.

It opened one eye like a morning begun,

And said, do not worship the dark you outrun.

Final Chorus

Breath, stay with me.

Breath, carry me through.

If the grave knows my shadow,

Let God know me too.

Breath, witness me.

Breath, make me a sign:

The human can suffer

And still not decline.

—

The Last Use of Hidden Knowledge

At the end of every secret, I ask for a bowl.

Not a crown.

Not a throne either.

Not the power to make unseen things kneel.

A bowl.

Something that can hold soup.

Something that can hold water for the fevered.

Something that can be washed and passed to the next person.

If knowledge can't become a bowl, it is still proud.

If wisdom can't sit in the kitchen, it's still performing.

If magic can't help the living stay alive, it has mistaken smoke for spirit.

So I put the old books back on the shelf.

I take only what makes the hand gentler.

I leave behind what makes the ego hungry.

Then I return to the breath.

In.

Out.

The first scripture.

The last.

—

I am the first and the last

THE PULSE

Yesterday

I. The Morning Before the Wars

Do not begin with the fire.

Begin with coffee.

Begin with the steam
lifting from paper cups
in hands that had not yet learned
they were holding their last ordinary hour.

Begin with the heel
clicking against tile.

Begin with the elevator
opening its silver mouth.

Begin with the woman
checking lipstick
in the dark window
of a train.

Begin with the man
running late

and angry about it,
as if time were still
a small inconvenience
and not a cliff.

Begin with the deli knife
cutting bread.

Begin with the newsstand.

Begin with the cab horn.

Begin with the river
carrying morning light
as if the day
were entitled to mercy.

Begin with the city
before it became symbol.

Before the flags.

Before the speeches.

Before the maps
were taken out
and the world was divided
by men who knew how
to turn mourning
into machinery.

Begin with September
as weather.

Blue sky.

Terribly blue.

The kind of blue
that makes the soul
trust the ceiling.

The kind of blue
a child might draw
with one crayon
and call finished.

Above Manhattan,
the air was so clear

it looked innocent.

This is what makes memory cruel:

the morning was beautiful.

Not almost beautiful.

Not darkened already
by warning.

Beautiful.

The sun entered offices
without asking permission.

It touched keyboards,
coffee stains,
family photographs,
plants leaning toward glass,
jackets over chairs,
paper stacked neatly
for work that would never
be completed.

Somewhere,
a phone rang
and rang
and rang.

Somewhere,
a voicemail became
the last room
a voice could enter.

Somewhere,
a mother heard her child say
I love you
with smoke learning the hallway.

Somewhere,
a man pressed his hand
against a window
too high above the earth
and understood
that even the sky
can become a locked door.

Do not make this clean.

don't let distance
polish the terror.

Stand there.

Stand in the stairwell.

Feel the heat
arriving before the flame.

Feel the crowd moving down
one body at a time,
one prayer at a time,
one shoe lost,
one shoulder held,
one stranger becoming kin
because death had entered
without checking names.

Stand in the lobby
where dust had not yet decided
what it would cover.

Stand in the street
as papers fall from the towers

like white birds
that had forgotten
how to be messages.

Contracts.

Calendars.

Receipts.

Meeting notes.

A grocery list.

Things the living wrote
because they believed
the afternoon would need them.

Then the sound.

Then the first impossible bloom
of smoke.

Then the second.

Then the city understood
that repetition
can be a form of cruelty.

And then the people ran.

Not as symbols.

Not as citizens
inside a future argument.

People.

A woman without shoes.

A man carrying another man
whose shirt had become red.

A firefighter walking upward
while everyone else
was being forgiven
for going down.

A priest with ash
on his black sleeve.

A secretary holding a stranger's hand
because the stranger
could no longer see.

A daughter calling.

A husband calling.

A brother calling.

A voice saying
I am here,
I am here,
I am here,
as if being here
could defeat
what was coming.

Then the towers fell.

don't say collapse
as if the word is large enough.

The city inhaled stone.

Day became a room
with no windows.

The sun disappeared
inside what men had done.

The mouth filled with building.

The eyelashes carried office.

The lungs turned into archive.

People walked north
covered in the gray stays
of desks, doors, ceilings, copies,
concrete, glass, bone,
and the unfinished errands
of thousands of lives.

Everyone looked old.

Even the young.

Especially the young.

A whole city
given the face
of a survivor
before noon.

And somewhere,
in the country of ringing phones,
families began to learn
the terrible shape
of unanswered sound.

I praise the dead.

But carefully.

Not as fuel.

Never as fuel.

I praise the office worker
who held the door.

I praise the cleaner
who knew the back hallway.

I praise the caller
who used the last breath
not for politics,
not for vengeance,
but for love.

I praise the passengers
who understood
the sky had become a battlefield
and still chose
the ground of others
over their own return.

I praise the firefighters
climbing into heat
with the simple, doomed faith
that someone above them
might still be reached.

I praise the city
for not knowing yet
what would be done
in its name.

That innocence too
deserves mourning.

Because after the ash,
another machinery woke.

A machinery of certainty.

A machinery of flags
too large for grief.

A machinery of men
saying evil
with clean mouths
while the dead
were still being carried
out in buckets.

But here,
at the front of the book,

before the wars enter,
before the prisons,
before the invasions,
before the child on another street
learns to fear the same sky,

let us stay
one moment longer
with the first wound.

Not because it is the only wound.

Because it was human.

Because every wound
is human
before power teaches it
to become a weapon.

Let the morning remain
with the dead.

Let the blue sky
answer for what it saw.

Let the dust settle
not over memory,
but into it.

Let every name
be restored
from symbol
back into person.

Let the hand at the window
be held.

Let the voice on the phone
be heard.

Let the stairwell
be remembered
as a place where strangers
turned into a nation
for one another
without needing an anthem.

And let the living
learn the first law
of sacred grief:

The dead don't ask
to be multiplied.

They ask
to be carried
without being turned
into fire.

II. Ash wasn't a Permission Slip

After the towers fell,
ash entered the mouth
of the century.

It tasted like office paper,
steel, jet fuel,
glass,
skin,
prayer,
and every ordinary thing
that had been forced
to become evidence.

The city washed itself
and could not become clean.

The rain came.

The hoses came.

The candles came.

The photographs came.

Have you seen him?

Have you seen her?

Missing.

Missing.

Missing.

A word posted on walls
until the walls themselves
became mothers.

A face beside a phone number.

A smile beside a wound.

A wedding photograph.

A graduation photograph.

A bad office badge.

A child on a father's shoulders.

The human world
trying to call back
what the violent world
had taken.

And for a while,
the grief was naked.

It had no uniform.

It had no policy.

It had no map.

It simply stood
in the smoke
with its hands open
and said:

Where are they?

That was the holy hour.

The hour before grief
was recruited.

The hour before men
with polished shoes
walked into the sanctuary
of the broken
and began measuring sorrow
for weapons.

The hour before pain
was taught to point outward
at children
who had never seen Manhattan.

The hour before mourning
was given a passport,
a target,
a doctrine,
a cage.

I want to stay there.

Before the second crime.

Before the drums.

Before the speeches
turned into engines.

Before the flags
were made so large
they covered faces.

Before the dead
were lifted from the ruins
and placed, unwilling,
behind every command
that followed.

Because ash
was not a permission slip.

A grave
isn't a border crossing
for revenge.

A name
isn't a bullet.

A mother's cry
isn't a mandate
to make another mother
speak the same language
of collapse.

But listen
to what power does.

It comes
at the funeral
with flowers in one hand
and contracts in the other.

It says security
while counting oil, contracts, votes,
bases, cameras, wire, law.

It says freedom
while building rooms
where men disappear.

It says justice
but looks too long
at the map.

It says never again
and somehow means
again, but elsewhere.

It says remember the dead
and then forgets
the living.

This is how the second tower falls.

Not in the city.

In the soul.

First the building.

Then the conscience.

First the smoke.

Then the permission.

First the victims.

Then the story
that makes victims useful.

No.

Let the dead refuse us.

Let them stand
at the door of every war room
and say:

don't use me.

Do not place my photograph
beside your hunger
for history.

Do not turn my last phone call
into a drumbeat.

Do not make my child's orphanhood
the seed
of another child's fear.

Let the passenger refuse.

Let the firefighter refuse.

Let the office worker refuse.

Let the woman in the stairwell refuse.

Let the man at the window refuse.

Let the body not found refuse.

Let every fragment
gathered with trembling hands
refuse.

I am not your anthem for blood.

I am not your clean reason.

I am not your holy wound.

I am dead.

Be careful
what you do
in the presence
of the dead.

There is a city after catastrophe
and there is a world after revenge.

They aren't the same world.

In the first,
people carry water.

They hold photographs.

They dig.

They donate blood.

They walk home
over bridges
because the trains have stopped
and the body, somehow,
still knows the direction
of love.

In the second,
men sit at tables
and speak of eras.

They turn grief
into architecture.

They build laws
with no sunset.

They build prisons
with no windows.

They build enemies
large enough
to hide their fear inside.

They build a future
where children in far cities
wake to the same sound
and don't know
which dead person's name
has been placed
inside the bomb.

That's why I tremble
at the beginning.

Not only for what happened.

For what happens
after what happened.

For the mouth of grief
when empire teaches it grammar.

For the innocent
made sacred,
then useful,
then absent.

For the way a candle
can become a fuse
in the wrong hands.

So here,
before the book descends
into rubble, hunger, hospitals,
rooms without walls,
girls who do not return
to their desks,

let this be written
on the first door:

Mourn first.

Mourn deeply.

Mourn without needing
to become cruel.

Let guilt find the guilty.

Let law find the criminal.

Let God find the soul.

But let no child
be made answer
for a crime
he didn't dream.

Let no city
be broken
because another city
was broken.

Let no mother
be told
her child must pay
for someone else's dead.

Let no innocent life
become the receipt
for our fear.

The ash of that morning
still moves through history.

It enters airports.

It enters classrooms.

It enters mosques, churches, synagogues,
temples, kitchens, courtrooms,
subway cars, schoolyards,
the throat of anyone
whose name turned into suspect
in the mouth of a stranger.

It enters soldiers.

It enters prisoners.

It enters children
born after the smoke

who still inherit
the shape of suspicion.

Ash travels
when no one buries it properly.

So bury it properly.

Not by forgetting.

Never by forgetting.

Bury it with names.

Bury it with truth.

Bury it with the courage
to say the wound was real
and the revenge was not holy.

Bury it with every photograph
returned to personhood.

Bury it with every last call
heard as love,
not command.

Bury it with every siren
allowed to end.

Bury it with the promise
that the first horror
will not be permitted
to father the next.

Then maybe the morning
can become morning again.

Maybe the sky
can stop apologizing
for what men did inside it.

Maybe the city
can keep its dead
without handing them
to the architects of fire.

Maybe the living
can walk forward
with grief in one hand
and mercy in the other,

not balanced,

not easy,

but human.

And maybe,
when the next generation
asks what happened
on that blue morning,

we will tell them everything.

The planes.

The towers.

The smoke.

The falling.

The running.

The brave.

The lost.

The ash.

The phones.

The names.

And then we will tell them
what grief tried to become.

And then we will tell them
what it must never
be allowed
to become again.

II. Mariam Hates Cardamom

Do not make the morning holy too quickly.

Mariam hated cardamom.
This was her great domestic heresy.

My mother would crush the pods anyway,
green seeds clicking under the spoon
like little bones refusing silence.

Mariam would complain from the doorway:

Again?
Does grief need perfume now?

And my mother, without looking up,
would say:

Grief gets whatever is in the cupboard.

This is the world before the wound enters history:
a brother stealing the heel of bread,
a sister pretending not to laugh,

a kettle coughing like an old uncle,
a cup chipped exactly where the mouth expects perfection.

No symbol yet.
No anthem.
No flag trying to stand on the table.

Just cardamom in the coffee,
Mariam making a face,
my mother calling her dramatic,
and the whole kitchen briefly saved
by being ordinary.

That is what war takes first.
Not life in its heroic posture.

Life arguing about spice.

MOVEMENT I

THE WITNESS ARRIVES

Here

Today Woke Up Ancient

Today woke up ancient.

It opened its eyes in a rented room above a shop, in a camp beside a fence, in a tower made of glass, in a mine where children entered the earth before the sun did. It opened its eyes in a parliament, in a prison, in a kitchen, in a border queue, in the throat of a man who had not slept because a drone kept circling like a thought he could not silence.

Do not tell me this is modern.

The shirt is modern. The camera is modern. The sentence has been translated into the language of policy, security, reform, development, stabilization, but the wound is older than the alphabet. A hand still reaches for land and calls it destiny. A crown still borrows God's name because theft looks better when it kneels first. A child still learns that some doors open easily for certain faces and become iron for others.

I have seen the same story wear many religions. I've also watched the same hunger wear many flags. I remember seeing the same empire shave its beard, change its suit, learn new vocabulary, hire softer voices, and continue the old work.

The first human keeps changing names; every age invents a new mask for the person it plans not to mourn.

Adam, dust, migrant, worker, savage, citizen, alien, refugee, collateral, suspect, orphan, terrorist, statistic, survivor. Every age believes it has invented a better word for the person it doesn't want to love.

But the body knows.

The body knows when the boot is old. The body knows when the law is only a fence with grammar. The body knows when a sermon has become a rope. The body knows when a leader speaks of glory because he has run out of mercy. The body knows the difference between bread and a speech about bread.

So I begin here, in today, because today is where all centuries hide.

Morning is coming through a cracked window; someone is already dividing the world. Someone is already selling the map. Someone is already teaching a child whom to fear. Someone is already praying with one hand and signing an arms contract with the other.

And someone, God bless them, is boiling water.

This is how the human race survives itself:
not by innocence,
not by victory,
not by the mercy of leaders,
but by those who keep making tea
while history reloads.

--

THE MAP ENTERS THE HOUSE

--

The First Theft Was a Boundary

Before the wall,
there was a line.

Before the line,
there was a man with a clean hand
standing far from the village,
saying this hill ends here,
this river starts there,
this olive tree now belongs
to the future he has invented.

Nobody asked the soil.

The soil was busy keeping bones,
seeds, footpaths, rainwater,
the laughter of girls carrying baskets,
the sweat of men who knew each stone
by the name of the cousin
who once tripped over it.

Then the surveyors arrived
with instruments bright as insects.
They didn't look cruel.
That was the trick.
Cruelty often enters the village
wearing measurement.

They measured the field
and forgot the funeral under it.
They measured the road

and forgot the bride who walked it.
They measured the spring
and forgot the grandmother
who lowered a copper cup into it
before any state had learned to spell ownership.

A boundary isn't born harmless.
It learns harm from the hand that draws it.

One line turns into a checkpoint.
One checkpoint becomes a prison.
One prison becomes a country
where the prisoner is called unstable
for wanting the door.

I have seen land stolen twice:
first by force,
then by explanation.

The second theft lasts longer.
It teaches the world to say dispute
where there is hunger,
complexity where there is a boot,
ancient hatred where there is a recent key
still warm from the palm
that was forced to drop it.

At the edge of the map,
a child asks his mother,
Where were we before the line?

She points to his chest.

Here,
she says.
Before the line,
we were here.
A map isn't innocent if someone had to vanish for it to become clean.

--

Song for the Soil That Refused Papers

Verse 1
The field did not sign.
The fig tree did not agree.
The river did not place its thumbprint
beneath the conqueror's decree.

The mountain kept its old posture.
The valley kept its dead.
The wheat rose anyway,
illiterate and fed.

Chorus
O soil, keep speaking under me.
O root, remember what they took.
They can stamp the air with borders,
but they cannot teach the seed to read the book.

Verse 2
They brought a flag to the orchard.
They brought a gun to the well.
They brought a priest to bless the treaty
and a judge to call it legal hell.

But the worm beneath the vineyard
was not impressed by law.
It touched the bone of the buried
and knew exactly what it saw.

Chorus
O soil, keep speaking under me.
O root, remember what they took.
They can stamp the air with borders,
but they cannot teach the seed to read the book.

Bridge
If I am made of dust,
then dust is my witness.
If I am made of clay,
then clay is my kin.
Every empire builds above us,
but the ground keeps taking attendance
from within.

Final Chorus
O soil, keep speaking under me.
O root, remember what they took.
When the last flag lowers in weather,
the earth will open its oldest book.

--

Race Was a Bad Dictionary

Race was a bad dictionary
written by men afraid of mirrors.

They opened the human face
and sorted it like stolen cargo:
light into power,
dark into labor,
features into verdict,
hair into border,
skin into weather report
for the soul.

They called this science.

Science, poor thing,
wasn't in the room.
It was outside, looking at stars,
counting the wings of insects,
trying to understand water.
Inside, men with cold hands
were measuring skulls
so greed could have a diagram.

Then the lie entered the classroom.
Then the classroom entered the child.
Then the child entered the street
already carrying a scale
no one admitted placing in his mouth.

This is how a people are injured
without a weapon:
you teach them to see themselves
through the eye of the thief.

You call their language broken.
You call their gods primitive.
You call their hair unprofessional.
You call their names difficult.
You call their food smell.
You call their grief anger.
You call their anger danger.
You call their danger proof.

And after a century,
you ask why they are tired.

I want a new dictionary.

Let black mean origin.
Let brown mean earth after rain.
Let white mean snow before the boot.
Let yellow mean dawn.
Let every color return
to the mercy of being seen
without becoming a sentence.

A face isn't evidence.
A body is not a border.
A people are not a theory.

The first human was dust,
and dust has never been one color.

Dust was never pure enough for the men who needed
purity to excuse theft.

--

The School of Vanishing Names

The child arrived at school
with a name full of ancestors.

It had a grandmother's river in it,
a father's village,
a mother's long vowel,
a saint, a season,
a lost orchard,
a joke only cousins understood.

The teacher looked down,
frowned,
and broke it into something easier.

The room laughed.

That was the first lesson.
Not arithmetic.
Not grammar either.
Not the shape of continents.
The first lesson was this:
survival sometimes begins
with making yourself pronounceable
to people who have no intention
of learning you.

Later came the history book.
It said discovered
where it meant came armed.

It said settled
where it meant pushed out.
It said labor
where it meant bondage.
It said conflict
where it meant one side had aircraft
and the other had family photographs.

Every empire loves school.
Not learning.
School.
The bell, the line, the uniform,
the map with the wound erased,
the language polished until the stolen land
sounds like a group project.

But children are dangerous.

They pass notes.
They mispronounce the official lie.
They ask why the museum has bones
but no apology.
They ask why the flag is clean
if it was born in smoke.
They ask why God speaks
only the language of the winners
in the textbook.

One girl writes her real name
inside her desk.

Then another.
Then another.

By spring,
the classroom is full of hidden countries.

A hidden name is still a country waiting for its border to fail.

--

THE GOD OF THE LOUDSPEAKER

--

They Put God in Uniform

They put God in uniform
and told Him to stand at attention.

They gave Him a flag,
a border,
a list of acceptable dead.
They taught Him the anthem.
They told Him which children
were worth angels
and which were only consequences.

I don't know how God survived us.

We have dragged the Holy
through so many rooms

it no longer recognizes its own name
in some mouths.

Men have used scripture
like a key to someone else's house.
They have used prayer
like perfume over gunpowder.
They have used prophecy
as a calendar for cruelty.
They have used the afterlife
to make the poor patient
with their own theft.

I've seen religion become a passport.
I've seen it become a checkpoint.
I have seen it become a knife
with a hymn carved into the handle.

But I have also seen a woman
feed a stranger because God was watching.
I've seen a man forgive the unforgivable
not because the wound was small,
but because his soul refused
to become the murderer twice.
I've seen an old priest,
an old imam,
an old rabbi,
an old monk
all sit beside a hospital bed

and discover silence
was the first religion.

So I won't surrender God
to the men who made Him cruel.

The river is not guilty
because a tyrant washed his hands in it.
The fire is not guilty
because a mob carried it.
The word is not guilty
because a liar quoted it well.

I take God back from the loudspeaker.

I return Him to bread,
to breath,
to the widow's lamp,
to the prisoner refusing hatred,
to the child asking why,
to the field after rain,
to the quiet hand
that lifts another human being
without asking which heaven
has stamped their papers.

--

Hymn Against the Borrowed Hatred

Do not inherit another man's enemy.

Your grandfather's wound
isn't a license
for your own blindness.
Your preacher's anger
is not revelation.
Your leader's fear
is not a map.
Your father's insult
is not a bloodline.

I have seen boys radicalized
by grief they didn't understand,
by videos cut into fire,
by men who turned humiliation
into recruitment,
by algorithms that learned
the exact hour loneliness opens.

A boy does not become dangerous
all at once.

First he is unseen.
Then he is mocked.
Then he is poor.
Then he is told his poverty has a face.
Then he is given a myth
large enough to hide his shame.
Then someone hands him a cause
that doesn't ask him to heal,
only to burn.

This is how hatred becomes shelter.

But shelter made of hatred
always collapses inward.
It kills the guest first.

I want to speak to the boy
before the wrong fire finds him.
Brother,
your wound is real.
The men using it are not your saviors.
Brother,
your anger has a name,
but it is not the name they taught you.
Brother,
your life is not a weapon
because someone failed to love you well.

Come back to the human table.
Break bread before breaking yourself.
Let the wound be witness,
not master.
Let God be larger
than the smallest man
who claims Him.

--

The Boy Who Learned Fire From a Screen

He learned fire from a screen.

Not the old fire,
not the grandmother fire
that softened beans,
warmed hands,
kept stories alive
when electricity betrayed the village.

This was a flat fire,
a blue fire,
a comment-section fire,
a fire that asked for no wood,
only attention.

It showed him enemies
before it showed him himself.
It fed him speeches
cut from the cloth of wounded men.
It taught him that cruelty was courage
if performed with enough certainty.
It taught him that every woman was a test,
every stranger a threat,
every question a trap,
every mercy a weakness
invented by people who wanted him conquered.

He was fifteen.

Fifteen is still milk behind the teeth.
Fifteen is still a mother knocking

before entering the room.
Fifteen is still pretending not to need a hug.

But the screen called him warrior.
The screen called him chosen.
The screen called him awake.
The screen gave him brothers
who never asked if he had eaten.

By winter,
his eyes were older than his hands.

His mother placed soup beside him.
He let it go cold.
His little sister asked him to fix her kite.
He said he was busy saving civilization.
Outside,
a real bird sat on a real wire
and survived without ideology.

I want to break the screen
and bless the boy.

I want to say:
Awakening isn't when you learn whom to despise.
Awakening is when no one can rent your wound anymore.

Any voice that needs your loneliness to stay hungry isn't your brother.

--

Verse 1
The crowd has a mouth,
but it has no mother.
The crowd has a fist,
but it has no grave.
It will tell you to burn
what it will not bury,
and praise you for wounds
it will not help save.

Chorus
Do not hand your soul to the crowd.
Do not let the drum decide your name.
If the fire asks for children,
it is not holy,
it is only fire
lying through flame.

Verse 2
The crowd loves a slogan
because slogans do not bleed.
The crowd loves a martyr
when someone else must die.
The crowd loves a leader
who makes hunger sound noble
while the leader eats well
under a guarded sky.

Chorus
Do not hand your soul to the crowd.
Do not let the drum decide your name.
If the fire asks for children,
it is not holy,
it is only fire
lying through flame.

Bridge
Stand alone long enough
to hear your own breathing.
Stand alone long enough
to know what is true.
A people can rise without becoming a mob.
A wound can speak
without devouring you.

Final Chorus
Do not hand your soul to the crowd.
Keep one room inside you clean.
When the world comes shouting for blood,
let your heart ask first
what the shouting means.

--

THE CITY OF LEADERS

--

The Leader Smiles With Other People's Teeth

The leader smiles
with other people's teeth.
That's why it shines so much.
He has collected them from prisons,
from mines,
from villages cleared before dawn,
from workers who laughed too loudly
at the wrong meeting,
from mothers who asked where their sons were,
from journalists who thought truth
was protected by the beauty of being true.
He stands above the crowd
and speaks of sacrifice.

Always sacrifice.
Never his.

He says nation
and means his chair.
He says God
and means permission.
He says security
and means silence.
He says family
and means obedience.
He says traitor
and points at anyone
whose memory is longer than the speech.

The crowd loves him
because he simplifies pain.

He gives their hunger a costume.
He gives their loneliness a flag.
He gives their fear a foreign accent.
He gives their shame a border.
He tells them they are poor
because someone weaker stole their greatness.

This is the oldest trick of power:
make the wounded fight the wounded
while the palace counts.

But a day comes
when the microphone coughs.
A day comes

when the portrait on every wall
starts to look afraid.
A day comes
when one woman in the market
refuses to lower her voice.

The leader hears it.

Not the sentence.
The tone.

History always begins again
in the throat
of someone who stops whispering.

--

The Minister of Hunger

The Minister of Hunger
never misses lunch.

He speaks on television
about resilience,
about tightening belts,
about shared responsibility,
about the difficult but necessary season
ahead.

Behind him,
flowers.
Beside him,

water in a glass so clean
it looks like another class of rain.

In the district of empty cupboards,
a mother counts rice
as if each grain were a citizen
she has failed to protect.

One for the small child.
One for the old father.
None for herself.
Again.

Poverty isn't absence.
Poverty is architecture.
Someone designed the long walk
to the clinic.
Someone priced the medicine
above the fever.
Someone made the school free
and the shoes impossible.
Someone taught the landlord
to speak like weather.
Someone made the worker grateful
for the wage that breaks him slowly.

don't tell me hunger is natural
in a world that throws bread away.

Hunger has managers.
Hunger has shareholders.
Hunger has a conference pass.

Hunger has polished shoes.
Hunger has a foundation
named after the man
who caused it.

The Minister smiles.

The mother adds water to the pot.
The soup turns into thinner.
The child's eyes become larger.
God watches.

I don't know how the sky
keeps its temper.

The sky keeps its temper because mothers keep losing
theirs into pots.

--

Gold Has No Grave

Gold has no grave.

It passes from empire to empire
without learning grief.
It sleeps in vaults,
in teeth,
in circuits,
in wedding bangles,
in the dust of mines

where boys descend before language
has finished making them children.

Gold doesn't remember
the hands that pulled it from the dark.
But the hands remember.

The hands remember the cough,
the tunnel,
the foreman,
the river turned bitter,
the mountain opened
like a body under interrogation.

Greed is not desire.
Desire can still blush.
Greed has forgotten the face
of enough.

Greed builds a palace
and calls it growth.
Greed burns a forest
and calls it extraction.
Greed poisons a river
and calls it trade.
Greed empties a country
then sells the refugee
a life jacket.

I have seen men kneel to gold
more faithfully than they kneel to God.

At least God asks for mercy.
Gold asks only for more.

There should be a graveyard
for wealth that killed.
A field of black stones
marked:
Here lies the profit
from a child without lungs.
Here lies the dividend
from a river without fish.
Here lies the bonus
from a village without roofs.

But gold has no grave; so I write one.

--

The Poor Keep the Calendar

The poor keep the calendar
better than kings.

Rent day.
Medicine day.
The day the electricity will be cut.
The day the debt man comes.
The day the school asks for fees
with a soft voice and a hard deadline.
The day the border office opens.

The day the remittance comes.
The day the youngest asks
why the rich children have birthdays
and he has waiting.

A king measures time by monuments.
A worker measures time by knees.

The poor know the month
by what disappears first:
meat,
fruit,
bus fare,
patience,
pride.

And still they perform miracles
without press releases.
They stretch bread
into hospitality.
They turn one chicken
into three days of mercy.
They sew uniforms under weak light.
They learn the science
of making a child feel full
before the stomach agrees.

Do not call them simple.

A poor mother is a mathematician
of the impossible.
A poor father is an engineer

of tomorrow's small hope.
A poor child is a philosopher
before anyone has taught him the word why.

The wealthy say:
Time is money.

The poor say nothing.
They are too busy proving
time is bread,
time is bus fare,
time is medicine,
time is the distance between illness
and a locked clinic door.

At midnight,
a woman writes the next month
on a scrap of paper.

Every date looks like a test.

She circles one square.
That is when the baby is due.

Life,
reckless as God,
keeps arriving
without permission from poverty.

--

--

Checkpoint Psalm

At the checkpoint,
time isn't time.

It turns into a dog
trained to smell humiliation.
It circles the line.
It bites the old man first.

A woman holds documents
like a second nervous system.
A boy rehearses his birthday
in case the soldier asks.
A father keeps his anger
behind his teeth
because teeth can be counted later
on the floor of a cell.

The sun stands above us,
free and useless.

No one checks the sun's papers.
Nobody asks the wind
why it crossed.
No one stops the dust
for suspicious movement
between villages.

Only the human body
must justify its geography.
Occupation isn't only land.
it's the colonization of the minute.
it's the theft of arrival.
it's making a mother late
to her own mother's death.
it's making a student age
in a line.
it's teaching the bladder
to respect authority.
it's asking permission
to reach the hospital
while the body argues with blood.
A soldier waves one car through.
A soldier stops another.
God is dragged into the booth
by men who think chosen
means exempt from mercy.
I whisper a psalm
no empire canonized:
Blessed are the ones
who keep their faces human
under the eye of the gun.
Blessed are the mothers
who smuggle tenderness
through metal gates.

Blessed are the children
who still draw birds
above walls.
Blessed is the dust
that crosses without permission
and lands
on every uniform equally.

--

Checkpoint With a Man Inside It

The soldier was nineteen.

This doesn't absolve him.
It makes the uniform more frightening.

He had acne under the helmet.
He kept touching the strap beneath his chin
as if the body still belonged to him.

My uncle held the permit.
The permit held the road.
The road held the hospital.
The hospital held my aunt
trying not to bleed too loudly.

The soldier read the date three times.

Behind him, the officer smoked.
Behind us, the cars turned into a village
of engines and thirst.

For one second, the boy in the uniform looked up.
Not at the crowd.
At my uncle
as if he had just remembered
that every order eventually comes
at a human face.

Then the officer said something.
The strap returned to his hand.
The gate stayed closed.

I don't forgive the checkpoint.

But I remember the boy inside the machine
because the machine depends on everyone forgetting him
including himself.

Water Permit

The village needs permission
for water.

I want you to sit with that
until the sentence begins to rot.

Permission for water.
Permission for the well
that knew their great-grandmothers.
Permission for the pipe.
Permission for the rain tank.
Permission for the cistern

where frogs used to sing
before bureaucracy learned thirst.

There are sentences so evil they don't need adjectives.

A child turns the tap.
Air comes out first,
like a ghost trying to speak.
Then a cough of brown water.
Then nothing.

His mother places buckets
beside the door
as if waiting for guests.

In the settlement on the hill,
lawns shine green
with the confidence of stolen weather.
The sprinklers turn slowly,
like soft machine prayers.

Water is the first human right
and the first hostage.

Control water
and you control the body.
Control the body
and you control the day.
Control the day
and you can make a people
look disorganized,
late,

angry,
unclean,
then punish them
for what your hand has arranged.

I have no metaphor for thirst.

Thirst is thirst.
It needs no poetry.

But because the world ignores plain things,
I will say this:
A dry mouth is a courtroom.
Every cracked lip testifies.
Every empty bucket
cross-examines the flag.

And if God made water
before He made our arguments,
then every permit office
will one day answer
to the river.

--

The House Learns to Kneel

The house learns to kneel
when the bombs begin.

First the windows bow.
Then the door folds inward.

Then the roof lowers itself
over the family
like a tired animal
trying to protect what it crushes.

Afterward,
men in helmets arrive
and ask what was inside.

Inside?

Inside was a blue cup.
Inside was a school certificate.
Inside was the smell of cumin.
Inside was a mattress where two brothers
kicked each other in sleep.
Inside was a photograph
of a woman before grief
changed the grammar of her face.
Inside was the sweater
one daughter hated
and now everyone searches for
because hate is also a form of memory.

Inside was Friday.
Inside was rent.
Inside was a father pretending
he knew how to fix the fan.
Inside was a mother hiding sweets
for later.
Inside was a child

who had just learned the moon
doesn't follow only him.

They write:
Structure destroyed.

I write:
The house was alive.
It had elbows.
It had coughs.
It had arguments about onions.
It had a small leak
near the kitchen
and a wall where the youngest
had marked his height
with pencil.

Do not let them say structure.

Say home.
Say cup.
Say sweater.
Say onion.
Say pencil line.
Say the roof knelt
because the sky fell first.

A house is not rubble until the last person who remembers
its smell is gone.

--

Lullaby for a Street Under Drones

Sleep, little street,
if sleep can find you.

Sleep under the wing
that is not a bird.
Sleep under the eye
that does not blink.
Sleep while the machine
counts heat through concrete
and calls it intelligence.

The mothers are tired
of inventing weather.
They tell the children,
It is thunder.
They tell the children,
It is a motorcycle.
They tell the children,
It is far away.

Children are merciful.
They pretend to believe
so their mothers can breathe.

Sleep, little street.
Your bakery is gone,
but flour remembers hands.
Your school is gone,
but chalk dust still floats

somewhere in the lungs of morning.
Your mosque is cracked,
your church is open to rain,
your clinic is a rumor
with bandages for wings.

Still,
someone has hung laundry.

This is how I know
the end has not won.
Laundry is the flag
of ordinary continuation.
A shirt on a line
is a revolution
against the announcement of extinction.

Sleep, little street.
If the drone returns,
let it find socks,
children's trousers,
a mother's black dress,
a towel patched twice,
all of them moving in the wind
as if the dead themselves
were refusing to stay still.

--

--

Migration Is the Oldest Biography

Migration is the oldest biography.

Before nation,
before passport,
before the office with fluorescent lights
and a man who stamps fear into paper,
the human being walked.

We walked from drought.
We walked from hunger.
We walked after animals.
We walked after stars.
We walked because the river changed its mind.
We walked because another tribe came with sharper stones.
We walked because love was in the next valley.
We walked because God said go.
We walked because home became impossible
and impossible is a country
many people know by smell.

Now they call us migrants
as if movement were a crime
invented yesterday.

But every border guard
is the child of someone who crossed.

Every parliament
sits on an old road.
Every national anthem
is sung by lungs descended
from wanderers.

I have carried home
in a plastic bag.
I've seen men fold documents
more carefully than blankets.
I've also seen women hide gold
in hems,
photographs in bras,
names under tongues.

The road doesn't ask
if you are legal.
The road asks
if your feet can continue.

At night,
the refugees sleep beside one another
like commas in a sentence
the world refuses to finish.

In the morning,
one child wakes
and asks for breakfast.

This is the scandal:
even exile must feed the living.

--

Sea Manuscript

The sea has swallowed
more testimonies
than any archive.

It keeps shoes,
phones,
headscarves,
small shirts,
coins from countries
that no longer answer the dead.

The sea doesn't hate us.
It isn't cruel.
It is only large,
and we have made land
so unbearable
that people bargain with drowning.

Do not blame the boat.

The boat is a poor man's angel,
wooden,
overcrowded,

terrified,
doing the work
of governments that abandoned mercy.

Do not blame the smuggler only.
Yes, curse his greed.
But curse also the visa office,
the warlord,
the arms dealer,
the border policy,
the famine market,
the mine contract,
the leader who emptied the village,
the rich nation that needs labor
but not the laborer's face.

A mother ties a plastic bottle
to her child's waist.
She calls it hope
because there is no better word
available at sea.

The waves read the manuscript
of the boat.
Every body is a letter.
Every scream is punctuation.
Every silence afterward
is a page torn out.

On the shore,
men in uniforms count survivors.

The sea counts differently.
It counts the ones
who almost reached language.

--

Camp Alphabet

A is for asylum,
a word with a locked mouth.
B is for blanket,
shared by three brothers
and one fever.
C is for camp,
which means temporary
until a child is born there,
learns to walk there,
falls in love there,
and calls the mud familiar.
D is for document,
the paper that decides
whether your grief is recognized
by the civilized world.
E is for education,
a tent where the teacher writes
tomorrow on a board
that keeps falling down.

F is for fence,
the metal language
of people who fear your hunger.

G is for God,
who enters without registration.

H is for home,
which everyone defines differently:
for the old, a place behind them;
for the young, a story they inherit
like a key to a house
that may not exist.

I is for ID,
the small card that becomes
larger than the body.

J is for jasmine,
smuggled in memory.

K is for kettle,
boiling the same water
into courage.

L is for line,
food line,
clinic line,
water line,
interview line,
line of people
waiting to be believed.

M is for mother,
which is every camp's
unofficial government.

N is for name,
miswritten, shortened,
called, lost,
called again.

O is for ordinary,
the life everyone misses most.

P is for prayer,
sometimes whispered,
sometimes screamed,
sometimes only the act
of standing up again.

Q is for quiet,
rare as fruit.

R is for return,
the word kept under pillows.

S is for soap,
for dignity,
for the body insisting
it is not only displaced.

T is for tent,
cloth citizenship.

U is for us,
a pronoun the camp repairs.

V is for visa,
a small god with office hours.

W is for winter,
which enters the poor first.

X is for the signature
of those who cannot write
their new lives yet.

Y is for yesterday,
which keeps visiting.

Z is for zero,
the number assigned
to what a person owns
when the world has taken everything
except breath.

--

The Child at the Border Asks for Tomorrow

The child at the border asks for tomorrow
as if tomorrow were a cup of water
someone was hiding.

His father doesn't answer.
Fathers hate becoming poor
in front of questions.

The line moves by inches.
The sun moves by law.
The soldiers move when they want.

Behind them,
a country has become smoke.
Ahead of them,
a country has become paperwork.
Between the two,
the child holds a toy car
with one wheel missing.

He drives it along the concrete barrier.
Brrr, he says.
Brrr.

Nobody has told him
the world is a machine
that often runs best
when children don't understand it.

A woman behind them
begins to cry quietly.
A man in front
offers dates from a napkin.
A guard shouts.
A baby answers with a scream
older than any language.

The child looks up again.
Will tomorrow have breakfast?

This time his mother kneels.
She takes his face in both hands
as if holding a lamp in wind.

Yes,
she says.

It isn't a promise.
It is a rebellion.

--

THE TRIAL

CONDEMNATION MACHINE

The machine asks the grieving man
to condemn.

He has blood on his sleeve,
dust in his hair,
a missing brother,
a father under concrete,
a mother whose phone rings
inside a house that no longer has walls.

Still, the machine asks:
Do you condemn?

Not mourn.
Not explain either.
Not breathe.

Not drink water.
Condemn.

The machine loves this question
because it looks moral
while doing no moral work.

It turns the occupied into suspects
of their own suffering.
It turns the bombed into analysts.
It turns the bereaved into spokesmen
for crimes they did not commit.
It makes a man prove his humanity
before allowing him grief.

I have never seen the machine
ask power the same way.

It does not ask the pilot
to condemn the sky.
It does not ask the minister
to condemn the contract.
It does not ask the factory
to condemn the weapon.
It does not ask the empire
to condemn the map.

Only the wounded
must pass the entrance exam.

Power never has to prove its grief before it is allowed to speak.

So I answer for him:
I condemn the murder of children.
All children.
Everywhere.
By everyone.
With knife, bomb, hunger, policy,
neglect, scripture, revenge,
profit, border, or silence.
There.
Now let the grieving man sit down.
His dead are waiting
for their names.

--

The Journalist Washes His Hands in Static

The journalist washes his hands in static.
He says allegedly
where the smoke is still rising.
He says both sides
when one side controls the water.
He says clash
when soldiers enter a house.
He says died
when someone was killed.
He says militants

near the body of a child
because proximity has become evidence
in the grammar of empire.

I don't hate the journalist.
Some are brave enough
to make truth expensive.
Some have paid with their faces,
their families,
their last breath under a vest
marked PRESS
as if the word could stop metal.

But I know the newsroom
where conscience goes
for editing.

A producer says soften.
An editor says balance.
A sponsor says context.
A government says access.
A platform says guidelines.
A coward says complicated.

By evening,
the headline is clean.
Too clean.
A floor after bleach.
No blood,
only shine.

Somewhere,
a mother opens the article
and doesn't recognize her son.

He has become incident.
He has become number.
He has become escalation.
He has become unfortunate.

I want journalism
that comes back the face
to the sentence.

I want a headline
that kneels beside the body
and says:
Forgive us.
We arrived with vocabulary
when we should have brought a shovel.

--

Genocide Is Not a Weather Event

Genocide isn't a weather event.
The storm didn't choose the address. A man did.

It doesn't simply happen,
like rain arriving
from a cloud no one elected.

Before the killing,
there is grammar.
Before the grammar,
there is rehearsal.
Before rehearsal,
there is a joke everyone lets pass.
Before the joke,
there is a theory.
Before the theory,
there is a fear
fed carefully
by men who profit
from separating the human family
into edible and sacred.

First they say those people.
Then infestation.
Then threat.
Then problem.
Then operation.
Then necessary.

By the time the graves open,
the language has already done
half the digging.

This is why I listen
to small words.

A slur is a seed.
A rumor is a match.

A border is a rehearsal.
A census can become a weapon
if the hand holding it
has stopped seeing faces.

Do not tell me no one knew.

The shopkeeper knew.
The teacher knew.
The priest knew.
The neighbor knew.
The border agent knew.
The company selling fuel knew.
The pilot knew enough.
The minister knew enough.
The world knew enough
to look away efficiently.

Genocide isn't a storm.
It is a committee.
It is a budget.
It is a prayer corrupted
into permission.
It is paperwork warmed
by the body heat of cowards.

And survival,
God bless survival,
is also organized.

A hidden child.
A false name.

A loaf divided.
A door left unlocked.
A boat at midnight.
A witness who writes.
A grandmother who says,
Remember this,
even if remembering burns.

--

Ledger of the Erased

there's a ledger
kept under the world.
Not by governments.
They lose what shames them.
Not by museums.
They label bones too politely.
Not by victors.
They are bad accountants
of other people's pain.
The ledger is kept by mothers.
A tooth wrapped in cloth.
A birth date written
inside a prayer book.
A recipe spoken aloud
to keep the dead fed

in language.
A lullaby carried
across a sea.
A photograph hidden
behind a loose brick.
A village name repeated
to grandchildren
who have never seen the road.

Erasure is not only destruction.
Erasure is replacement.
It puts a new name on the hill.
It builds a park over the prison.
It turns the massacre site
into parking.
It calls the stolen house charming.
It makes the survivor sound bitter
for remembering the key.

But memory is stubborn.

It grows through concrete
like grass with a criminal record.
It enters songs.
It stains jokes.
It comes back as a child's face
looking too much like someone
history failed to finish killing.

I open the ledger.

The pages are made of skin,
soil,
breath,
rain,
ashes,
and the handwriting
of those who refused
final silence.

There are names here
that no state recognizes.

God recognizes them.
That is enough
for the beginning of justice.

--

NIGHT SCHOOL

--

THE RADICALIZER'S PRAYER

The radicalizer prays beautifully; that's the danger.

He knows when to lower his voice.
He knows when to mention the dead.
He knows which verse
to pull from its river
and sharpen into a hook.

He knows loneliness.
He can smell it
through a phone.
He says brother.
He says sister.
He says they will never love you.
He says your pain is proof.
He says mercy is betrayal.
He says doubt is weakness.
He says the world is divided
between the pure and the disposable.
He doesn't begin with murder.
He begins with belonging.
That is why the wound listens.
A humiliated soul
will drink poison
if the bottle says purpose.
I want to interrupt the sermon.
I want to stand between the boy
and the perfect answer.
I want to say:
Any God who needs you
less human
isn't God.
Any leader who needs you
more wounded
isn't savior.

Any brotherhood that begins
by making the world smaller
will one day make your grave smaller too.

The radicalizer closes his eyes.
He has mistaken intensity
for truth.

Outside,
a woman waters basil
in a chipped can.
She does more for God
than his entire speech.

--

How Boys Become Doors for the Wrong Fire

Boys become doors
for the wrong fire
when no one knocks gently.

When the father disappears
into work, prison, alcohol, shame,
or the silent country inside men
where tenderness is treated
like contraband.

When the school sees trouble
before it sees hunger.

When the street offers rank.
When the screen offers myth.
When the state offers suspicion.
When the preacher offers certainty.
When the recruiter offers a family
that doesn't ask him to be soft.

A boy wants to matter.
This isn't evil.
This is human.

But if the only doorway to mattering
is violence,
then violence will wear shoes
his size.

I have seen it.
The shoulders harden first.
Then the laugh changes.
Then the eyes stop asking.
Then every sentence
becomes a wall.
Then he says real men
and the child inside him
steps backward into darkness.

Who taught him
that tenderness was female?
Who taught him
that mercy was defeat?
Who taught him

that domination was the only proof
his wound had become muscle?

A mother calls him to dinner.
He says he isn't hungry.

But he is hungry.

Hungry for witness.
Hungry for honorable labor.
Hungry for a hand on the shoulder
that does not turn into command.
Hungry for elders
who can admit they are afraid.
Hungry for a world
where his dignity
does not require someone else's humiliation.

Give the boy a garden.
Give him tools.
Give him music.
Give him a place to grieve
without being laughed at.
Give him stories
where courage protects
instead of consumes.

Close the door
to the wrong fire
before it learns his name.

--

The Mother Interrupts the War

The mother interrupts the war
by calling everyone inside to eat.

The soldiers don't know
what to do with this.
The generals hate it.
The commentators find it naive.
The dead understand immediately.

She places bread on the table
as if bread were an argument
older than every border.
She tears it by hand.
Not evenly.
Mercy isn't a measurement.

A child reaches.
A stranger reaches.
A cousin who joined the wrong side reaches.
An old man who said terrible things
when he was afraid reaches.
A girl with dust in her hair reaches.
A boy with revenge in his throat hesitates,
then reaches.

The mother sees him.

She does not forgive the killing.
She does not erase the crime.

She does not call injustice misunderstanding.
She only says:
Eat first.
Nobody should make decisions
while starving.

This is not peace.
Not yet.
Peace is harder than bread.
Peace needs confession,
return,
repair,
land,
truth,
water,
keys,
trials,
apologies with bones in them.

But every peace
eventually needs a table.

And every table
begins with someone refusing
to let hunger
write the next law.

--

SURVIVAL

--

Bread After the Siren

After the siren,
bread.

Not because bread solves war.
Bread is not foolish.
It knows what it can't do.
It can't rebuild the school.
It cannot return the leg.
It cannot explain to the child
why the sky hates his street.

But bread can enter the mouth
when language fails.
Bread can remind the body
it is still invited
to continue.
Bread can pass from hand to hand
like a small republic
of warmth.

A woman lifts the flatbread
from the pan.
The room smells alive
against all evidence.

Someone laughs.
Too loudly.

Everyone turns.
Then one by one,
they laugh too.

This is survival's secret:
it is often inappropriate.

It laughs near graves.
It sings with a cracked tooth.
It flirts at funerals.
It plants mint
in a bucket with bullet holes.
It saves the good shirt
for a wedding no one has planned.
It tells children stories
while the adults listen harder.

Survival is not noble.
Nobility is too clean.
Survival is messy,
stubborn,
smoke-haired,
late with rent,
full of contradictions,
and carrying bread
wrapped in yesterday's news.

After the siren,
someone says,
Come.
Eat before it gets cold.

And death,
for one more minute,
isn't the host.

--

No Flag Can Replace a Face

No flag can replace a face.
I have tried to love flags.
They are beautiful sometimes,
especially from far away,
especially in wind,
especially when carried
by people who have survived
the men who betrayed the cloth.
But a flag can't kiss a child goodnight.
A flag cannot apologize.
A flag cannot smell smoke
and know which cousin's house
is burning.
A flag cannot sit beside the dying
and remember the first song
that made them dance.
The face is harder.
The face interrupts ideology.
It ruins the clean hatred.

It asks inconvenient things
of the slogan.
It says:
Look at me.
Not the category.
Not the rumor.
Not the history lesson
built to make my death useful.
Me.

This is why power hides faces.
It loves distance.
It loves aerial views.
It loves statistics.
It loves uniforms.
It loves crowds.
It loves anything
that lets the human being disappear
inside scale.

I want the opposite.

Bring me the face.
Bring me the laugh.
Bring me the crooked tooth.
Bring me the way he said water.
Bring me the song she hated.
Bring me the scar on the father's hand.
Bring me the grandmother's argument
with the radio.

Then tell me who deserves erasure.

Nobody will answer.
The face has already won.

--

The Human Race Is Still Here

After everything,
we are still here.

I don't mean a compliment. I mean an astonishment.

We should have ended
in the first cave,
the first famine,
the first brother's jealousy,
the first king's appetite,
the first priest's corruption,
the first empire's road,
the first ship hold,
the first camp,
the first mushroom cloud,
the first algorithm trained
to keep us angry enough
to sell ourselves back
in pieces.

And yet.

Someone is singing
while sweeping glass.
Someone is nursing a baby
in a passport office.
Someone is teaching the alphabet
under a tree.
Someone is crossing a sea
with a prayer tied to their wrist.
Someone is refusing
to hate the neighbor
assigned to them by history.
Someone is hiding a stranger.
Someone is telling the truth
with shaking hands.
Someone is planting trees
whose shade they will never sit in.
Someone is saying sorry.
Someone is saying no.
Someone is saying enough.
Someone is saying come in.

The human race is a road of ash,
yes.

But ash isn't only ending.
Ask the forest.
Ask the field.
Ask the bread oven.

Ask the incense
rising from a grandmother's room.
Ash means something burned.
Ash also means something remains.
I gather what remains:
a spoon,
a key,
a song,
a name,
a law rewritten,
a child laughing at the wrong time,
a mother alive in the body of her daughter,
a father learning tenderness late,
a table with one more chair
than revenge allowed.
The world isn't saved.
Do not lie.
But neither is it finished.
Do not surrender.

--

Tomorrow Will Ask What We Fed It

Tomorrow will ask what we fed it.
Not what we believed.
Belief is easy to embroider.

Not what we posted.
The screen forgets its own flames.
Not what we condemned.
Condemnation can become a clean way
to avoid repair.

Tomorrow will ask:
Who did you protect
when protection cost you?
What lie did you refuse
when the lie was popular?
Whose name did you learn
instead of shortening it?
Which hungry person ate
because you existed?
Which child saw you choose mercy
without calling it weakness?
Which border did you question?
Which inheritance did you interrupt?
Which leader did you stop worshiping?
Which grief did you keep from becoming hatred?

The human story is not one story.
It is many stories
fighting over the same fire.

One story says land belongs
to the strongest hand.
Another says land belongs

to the dead who trusted us
and the children who follow.

One story says God loves only our flag.
Another says God is too large
to fit inside victory.

One story says poverty is failure.
Another says poverty is often theft
with a long memory.

One story says survival is enough.
Another says survival must become justice
or the wound will educate the next war.

I don't know
which story will win.

I only know the work:
Feed the living.
Name the dead.
Break the false idol.
Refuse the easy enemy.
Return the stolen thing.
Teach the child a song
older than the gun.
Keep one lamp lit
for those still on the road.

And when morning comes,
if morning comes,
open the door

before asking
where the stranger was born.

The Archive Has a Pulse

Opening Note: What the Evidence Cannot Hold

This is not written against a people.
This is not written against a prayer.
This is not written so grief can become another costume for hatred.

No child carries the state.
No prayer launches the aircraft.
No grandmother speaks with the minister's mouth.

But the wound has owners.
The bomb has a serial number.
The order had a desk.
The footage had a body before it had a filename.

I am writing after the archive.
After the upload.
After the map pin.
After the warning that says the image may destroy the room inside you.
After the clip is saved before someone deletes it.
After the dead are made to prove, again, that they were alive.

This is journalistic poetry.
Not neutral.
and not careless.
Not clean.

The archive says: here is the evidence.
The poem says: here is the breath inside it.

I. The Archive Has a Pulse

Every archive starts as refusal.

Refusal to let the smoke speak alone.
Refusal to let the official sentence arrive first.
Refusal to let a child become
"unverified footage"
before becoming a name.

Someone saves the video.

Not because the video saves the dead.
It does not.

Not because the video stops the next strike.
It often does not.

But because erasure is patient,
and someone must be more patient than erasure.

Download.
Mirror.
Geolocate.
Translate.
Submit.
Preserve.

These are new verbs for mourning.

A mother once kept hair in a small envelope.
A father kept a key.
A grandmother kept the old recipe.
Now someone keeps the last seven seconds
before the street lost its shape.

Do not call this obsession.
The living are not hoarding pain.
They are protecting evidence
from the appetite of power.

Somewhere, a server hums
like a metal cemetery.

Inside it:
the truck,
the clinic,
the road,
the school,
the market,
the body lifted by hands
that were shaking too hard
to be cinematic.

The archive has no heart,
so we bring ours.

The archive has no prayer,
so we whisper one
while the file loads.

II. Content Warning

Before the footage opens,
the warning comes.

Graphic.

As if the child were the danger.
As if the image were the wound.
As if the viewer must be protected
from the truth
more carefully than the truth
was protected from the bomb.

Graphic.
Yes.

A severed policy is graphic.
A starving line is graphic.
A hospital without power is graphic.
A mother asked to identify what remains is graphic.
A country explaining why bread waited at the gate is graphic.

The real obscenity
is not the blood.

The real obscenity
is the clean room
where someone calls it pressure.

The real obscenity
is the sentence
humanitarian situation
said by a man
whose coffee is still warm.

The real obscenity
is the expert
who says context
while a father gathers his child
from the floor of the century.

Put the warning elsewhere.

Warning:
this government may turn a people into evidence.

Warning:
this ally may ask for patience while the living are buried.

Warning:
this headline may contain language designed to survive the dead.

Warning:
after watching,
you may no longer be able
to return to comfort
with both hands clean.

III. The Map Does Not Weep

The map is useful.
The map is cruel.

A pin appears.
Gaza City.
North Gaza.
Khan Younis.
Rafah.
A village near Hebron.
A road.
A field.
A house.
A tent.
A place where the world happened too violently
for language to arrive intact.

The map does not weep.

It doesn't smell the blanket.
It does not hear the stove clicking after the power dies.
It does not know the child hated tomatoes.
It does not know the old man fed cats
and cursed politicians in three dialects.

The map says location.
The mother says bedroom.

The map says coordinates.
The father says here,
here is where she learned to walk.

The map says event.
The brother says no,
this was Tuesday.

The map says target.
The grandmother says liar,
that was a kitchen.

Still, we need the map.

Because the murderer loves fog.
Because the official story loves distance.
Because a coordinate can become a witness
when the witness is dead.

So let the map speak.
Then let the poem answer.

Let the pin drop.
Then let the name rise.

IV. The Footage Was Once a Morning

Before the clip, there was morning.

A kettle.
A joke.
A boy refusing to wake.
A mother searching for the cleanest shirt.
A man arguing with the price of flour.
A girl braiding her sister's hair
with the seriousness of a treaty.

Before the clip,
someone had plans.

Not large plans.
Do not make them heroic.
They wanted batteries.
Soap.
A working charger.
A call from a cousin.
A way to keep the baby from coughing.
A little salt.
A ride.
A rumor that the road was open.
A rumor that the road was not.

Before the clip,
the city was not a symbol.

It was laundry.
It was tea.
It was debts.
It was someone saying
move your shoes from the door.

Then the sky entered; then the camera shook.

Then the morning turned into document.

And now strangers watch it
through glass
with their thumbs hovering
between grief and the next thing.

Pause.

Before you scroll,
give the dead back their morning.

Give them the kettle.
Give them the shirt.
Give them the argument over flour.
Give them the ordinary hour
that every empire steals first.

V. Unverified

They say unverified
and I understand.

A good witness must be careful.
A serious archive must not become rumor with a halo.

Truth deserves discipline.
Evidence deserves hands that don't shake too quickly.

But listen.

The dead have spent centuries
being asked for better paperwork.

The colonized were unverified.
The disappeared were unverified.
The starved were unverified.
The shot were unverified
until the shooter became the report.

A mother doesn't wait for verification
to know the weight has left the room.

A doctor doesn't need a committee
to know the generator is gone.

A child doesn't need geolocation
to understand the roof is not coming back.

So yes, verify.

But don't let verification
become a velvet rope
outside the burning house.

Verify
and bring water.

Verify
and call the minister.

Verify
and refuse the lie.

Verify
and remember
that the wound was real
before it became admissible.

VI. A Letter to the Person Who Archived the File

I do not know your name.

Maybe you are twenty-three,
awake at 4:11,
your face blue from the screen,
your body trying not to become stone.

Maybe you have watched so much death
that breakfast tastes like guilt.

Maybe your friends think you are distant.
Maybe your mother says
stop looking,
it will eat you.

Maybe it has.
Still, you keep saving.

You keep naming.

You keep sorting the unbearable
because the world made chaos
and then called chaos unknowable.

I want to tell you:
Drink water.

Look away for one minute
without calling it betrayal.

There is no archive worth your soul
if your soul forgets it is alive.

But also:
Thank you.

For the file that didn't vanish.
For the face that kept its name.
For the clip that reached a lawyer.
For the road that could be placed on a map.
For the child who entered the record
instead of the dark.

You aren't only watching death.

You are fighting the second death:
the one where the powerful say
nothing happened
and the world nods
because the evidence is gone.

VII. The Victim Tab

There is a tab for victims.

The word opens
like a hospital door.

Inside it,
the names stand close together.

Some names are full.
Some names are broken.
Some names are missing fathers.
Some names are only age,
place,
date,
a small human fact
held up against the machinery.

A victim isn't a small word.

It carries the body
after the world has dropped it.

But I want more than victim.

I want favorite fruit.
I want bad habit.
I want the song they overplayed.
I want the teacher who loved them.
I want the cousin they annoyed.
I want the photograph they hated.
I want the joke that made them ugly-laugh.
I want the shoes by the door.
I want the one thing they were saving for later.

Victim is true; but it is not enough.

The state already made them small.
Do not let the archive,
even in mercy,
make them only harmed.

Write victim, yes.
Then write human
until the page runs out of room.

VIII. The Live Map

Live, they call it.
Live map.
Live feed.
Live update.
The word live
stands beside the dead
and doesn't know what to do
with its hands.
Live means now.
Live means ongoing.
Live means the wound
has not agreed to become history.
Live means somewhere
a man is still breathing
under concrete
while the internet debates the source.
Live means the child in the clip
may have a cousin
watching the same clip
from exile,

learning grief
through pixels.

Live means the crime
has not finished its sentence.

Live means
don't wait for the museum.

Do not wait for the anniversary.
Do not wait for the plaque.
Do not wait for the school curriculum
that will one day say
the international community failed
as if failure were weather
and not a series of human choices
wearing polished shoes.

Live means now.

And now is a door
you are either opening
or holding shut.

IX. The Watermelon

Once, a fruit became a flag
because the flag was forbidden.

Red, green, black, white:
a country hidden in sweetness.

This is what oppressed people do.
They smuggle the nation
into ordinary things.

A key.
A scarf.
A song.
A seed.
A fruit cut open
on a kitchen table.

Power fears symbols
because symbols travel
without asking permission.

A watermelon can cross a checkpoint
as lunch
and arrive as memory.

A grandmother can slice it
for the children
and feed them geography
without saying the word land.

The archive takes the fruit's name
and becomes a storehouse
for what power wants deleted.

Do not laugh.

The world has always been saved
by ordinary things
given extraordinary duty.

Bread became resistance.
Water became testimony.
A phone became witness.
A fruit became a flag.
A file became a grave marker.
A poem became a hand
pressed against the door
saying:
Not erased.
Not yet.

X. Keep the Target Precise

Say this before the anger sharpens wrong.
A people is not its government.
A prayer is not a weapon.
No child is born carrying a ministry.
A Jewish prayer is not a bomb.
A Muslim prayer is not a tunnel.
A Christian prayer is not a border.
A Hebrew lullaby is not a policy.
An Arabic lullaby is not a threat.
Do not let power
teach your grief
to hate blindly.

Blind hatred is cheap.
Power sells it in bulk.

Be precise.

Name the army.
Name the minister.
Name the settlement.
Name the siege.
Name the contract.
Name the court.
Name the company.
Name the government.
Name the hand that signed.
Name the mouth that justified.
Name the newsroom that softened.
Name the ally that shipped.
Name the silence that waited.

Precision is not weakness.

Precision is how grief
keeps its soul.

The child does not need your bigotry; the child needs the machine stopped.

XI. The Journalist's Prayer

God of the record,
God of the shaking hand,
God of the file saved seconds before deletion,

protect the witness
from becoming only witness.

Let the journalist eat.
And let the photographer sleep.
And let the translator cry.
Let the researcher step outside
and find the sky still there.

But don't let the world sleep.

Disturb the comfortable sentence.
Break the passive voice.
Drag the verb back to the hand that acted.

Let no one say
bodies were found
when someone killed them.

Let no one say
aid was delayed
when someone blocked it.

Let no one say
a neighborhood vanished
when someone made it vanish.

Give us language
that doesn't launder blood.

Give us courage
that doesn't become hatred.

Give us grief
that does not become theatre.

Give us proof, yes.
But also give us enough mercy
to know what proof is for.

Ameen.
Amen.
Let it be written.
Let it be acted upon.

XII. What the Archive Asks

The archive does not ask you
to admire your sadness.

It asks:
What will your sadness do?

The archive doesn't ask you
to become a statue of rage.

It asks:
Can your rage carry water?

The archive doesn't ask you
to watch forever.

It asks:
After watching,

which door will you knock on?
Which lie will you refuse?
Which name will you learn?
Which official will you pressure?
Which child will you stop calling unfortunate?
Which comfort will you spend?

The archive isn't the end.

The archive is the table
where evidence sits down
and waits for courage.

Do not leave it there alone.

Bring your voice.
Bring your discipline.
Bring your tenderness.
Bring your refusal to hate a people.
Bring your refusal to excuse a system.
Bring your human hands
back from the glowing screen.

The footage is not asking
to be consumed.

The footage is asking
to become impossible to deny.

And after denial breaks,
work starts.

Closing: Hope, Incurable

Hope isn't soft here.

Hope is the file that survived deletion.
Hope is the name spelled correctly.
Hope is the witness who kept filming
with grief in his own house.
Hope is the doctor who used a phone for light.
Hope is the mother who fed one child
and lied beautifully to the other,
saying,
I already ate.

Hope isn't the opposite of horror; hope is what horror
failed to kill.

I've seen too much
to write a gentle ending.

But I have also seen
the living insist.

They return to the rubble
not because rubble is holy
but because something beloved
may still be underneath.

They call into the dark.
They lift stone.
They pass water.
They curse.
They pray.

They translate.
They upload.
They archive.
They testify.
They bury.
They begin again
with less than beginning should require.

This is the raw truth:
The world isn't innocent.

But neither is it finished.

Somewhere,
a child is still laughing
with a whole country
hidden in the sound.

Somewhere,
a grandmother is still saying
eat.

Somewhere,
a witness is pressing save.

Somewhere,
despite everything,
hope remains incurable.

Before the First Stone

Before the first stone was thrown,
someone owned the hill.

Before the first slogan opened its mouth,
someone signed a deed over a people
who were not in the room.

Before the first child learned
the sound of aircraft,
men in pressed shirts argued over maps
as if land were a tablecloth,
as if villages were crumbs,
as if God had given them pencils
instead of consciences.

I write this with both hands visible.
A people isn't a weapon.
No bloodline is a weapon.
No child inherits the crimes of a flag.
No synagogue is a sniper.
No mosque is a missile.
No church is a checkpoint.

But systems have names.
Armies have budgets.
Borders have teeth.
Occupations have architects.

And graves, whatever language is spoken above them,
know the weight of the body lowered inside.

This isn't a sermon against a people.
This is a sermon against the machine
that turns a people into target practice,
then asks the target to begin every sentence
with an apology.

I am not here to polish the wound.
I am here to hold it open
until the world stops calling blood
"a complicated situation."

--

Do Not Make My Grief Apologize

The first question is always a cage.

Before the mother can name her son,
before the journalist counts the children,
before the doctor lifts the sheet,
before the dust has decided
which face it will keep,
someone asks:

Do you condemn?

I have buried a city in my throat
and you want a password.

I've watched fathers carry bags
lighter than their children used to be

and you want my grief
properly formatted.

I've seen a boy dig with a spoon
because the shovel was under rubble
because the rubble was under a house
because the house was under a policy
because the policy was under a doctrine
because the doctrine was under a myth
because the myth was under a hunger
that never learned to stop eating land.

And still you ask:
Do you condemn?

Yes.
I condemn the murder of children.
All children.
Every child.
The child under the rocket.
The child under the bomb.
The child in the shelter.
The child in the hospital corridor.
The child whose name becomes a chant.
The child whose name becomes classified.
The child whose photograph is allowed to grieve.
The child whose photograph is called propaganda.

I condemn the hand that kills.
I condemn the mouth that blesses the hand.
I condemn the law that cleans the hand.

I condemn the camera that turns away from the hand.
I condemn the empire that ships the hand new gloves.

But don't make my grief apologize
before it's allowed to speak.

A people under rubble
should not have to pass a moral interview
before the world admits
that rubble is heavy.

--

Precision Against Hatred

Name the hand that acts.
Do not turn a whole people into the sentence.

A Jew isn't a checkpoint.
A Muslim isn't a tunnel.
A Christian isn't a drone.
An Arab isn't a threat.
A European isn't a policy.
A child isn't a demographic problem.
A grandmother isn't a security risk.
A people aren't the rumor
that frightened men invented about them.

I won't inherit the cheap hatred
that power keeps trying to sell me.

I know what racism does.
It enters history wearing a scholar's coat.

It measures skulls.
It redraws faces.
It says some bodies are closer to heaven
and some bodies are closer to mud.
It takes the wound of one people
and uses it to wound another.
It takes ancient suffering
and turns it into a license.
It takes holy books
and trains them to point like rifles.

No.

Do not sentence a people as one.
Do not turn prayer into evidence.
Do not make a mother tongue stand trial.

But an occupation has architects.
A siege has planners.
A policy of hunger has signatures.
A bomb dropped on a sleeping family has a chain of command.
A leader who says necessary over a grave has a name.
A minister who calls children animals has a name.
A newspaper that hides a massacre in passive voice has editors.
A world that knows and waits has witnesses.

don't confuse my precision for hatred.
I have no interest in hating a people.
I am busy trying to keep a people alive.

--

The Press Release Has No Mother

The press release has no mother.
that's why it speaks so calmly.

It says operation.
It says response.
It says unfortunate.
It says dense urban environment.
It says human shields.
It says proportional.
It says preliminary review.
It says every death is regrettable.

But the press release has never waited
outside an emergency room
with blood on its shoes.

The press release has never held
half a backpack.

The press release has never searched rubble
by smell.

The press release has never heard
a child call for water
from underneath a ceiling
that used to have stars painted on it.

The press release has no grandmother
who keeps the deed to a house
that became someone else's garden.

The press release has no aunt
who lines up for flour
and returns with news of another cousin.

The press release has no body,
which is why it survives every massacre
without limping.

I want language with a pulse.
I want words that sweat.
I want a sentence that kneels
beside the dead
and says their names before explaining them.

If a bomb hits a school,
say a bomb hit a school.

If a hospital goes dark,
say the hospital went dark
and the babies were not metaphors.

If the city is starving,
don't call it pressure.
Call it hunger.
Call it policy.
Call it the old empire
learning new software.

4. A Camera Is Not a Conscience

The camera comes
with its one bright eye.

It records the mother.
It records the smoke.
It records the stretcher.
It records the child
whose dust has made him older
than the men debating him.

Then it leaves.

A camera can witness without caring.
A camera can show the wound
and still not become a bandage.
A camera can turn a massacre
into a clip,
a clip into a discussion,
a discussion into fatigue,
fatigue into silence.

I have learned to fear the scroll.
It makes apocalypse portable.
It teaches the thumb
to pass over suffering
as if suffering were weather.

Here is the city.
Swipe.
Here is the orphan.
Swipe.

Here is the father carrying two daughters.
Swipe.
Here is the commentator explaining
why grief requires nuance.
Swipe.
Here is an advertisement for shoes.

God forgive us.
We have built windows into hell
and still manage to be bored.

So I ask the camera:
After you have taken the image,
what will you do with your hands?

I ask myself the same thing.

BOOK II: MAPS AND LAND

5. Men Drew Lines

Men drew lines
where shepherds knew rain.

They drew lines across dialect,
across cousin,
across olive grove,
across the hill where a saint was buried
with no interest in passports.

They drew lines
with empire still wet on their fingers.

This side, they said.
That side, they said.
Mine, they said.
Yours, they said,
as if the earth had asked
to be divided by men
who could not name her wildflowers.

Then the lines hardened.
They became border.
They became checkpoint.
They became permit.
They became prison.
They became the place
where a woman gives birth
between one soldier's boredom
and another soldier's order.

History repeats,
but not like a song.
Like a bruise.
Like a boot.
Like a signature
that keeps finding new paper.

Every century has its mapmakers.
Every century has its polite thieves.
Every century says:
This time is different.

And every century leaves behind
a child holding a key
to a house the map has eaten.

6. The Land Was Not Empty

The land wasn't empty.

It had bread cooling on cloth.
It had goats arguing with bells.
It had women shaking dust from rugs.
It had boys climbing trees
to steal figs before the owner yelled.
It had wells,
cemeteries,
market songs,
marriage ululations,
soap factories,
letters,
schools,
coffee,
keys,
thresholds rubbed smooth by generations of feet.

The land was not empty.

It was emptied.
There is a difference
and the dead insist on grammar.

don't say abandoned
when you mean expelled.

don't say conflict
when you mean conquest.
don't say disputed
when one hand has the gun
and the other hand has the deed.

The land was not empty.

It had names
before the new maps arrived
with their mouths full of replacement.
It had stones
that knew which family returned from harvest.
It had doors
that recognized the knock.

Now the door is gone.
The wall is gone.
The tree is older than the permit system
and still they ask the tree
for proof.

7. The Wall Learns Our Names

The wall learns our names.

It learns who has a permit
and who has a mother dying on the other side.
It learns which boy throws a stone
and which boy only thought of throwing one.
It learns the old man's limp,
the nurse's route,

the schoolgirl's braid,
the farmer's orchard,
the prayer time,
the ambulance siren,
the lie of temporary.

A wall is never only concrete.
It is a philosophy poured hard.
It is fear with rebar.
It is a sentence made visible:
You aren't fully human here.

But every wall studies the wrong subject.
It studies movement.
It studies bodies.
It studies roads.
It does not study longing.

Longing tunnels under stone.
Longing climbs with the vine.
Longing enters the dream
of the soldier sleeping beside the gate.
Longing waits in the grandmother's chest
like an ember wrapped in cloth.

The wall learns our names.
Fine.
Let it learn.

One day the wall will fall
and be remembered only
as a failed student of the human soul.

8. The Checkpoint Is a School

The checkpoint teaches early.

It teaches the child
that time belongs to the man with the rifle.

It teaches the father
to fold anger small enough
to fit behind his teeth.

It teaches the mother
to carry documents
like extra organs.

It teaches the old woman
that her medicine is less urgent
than the soldier's mood.

It teaches the student
that exams begin before the classroom.

It teaches the ambulance
that sirens are only suggestions
when power is bored.

This is occupation:
not one dramatic scene,
but a thousand daily thefts
so ordinary they begin to resemble weather.

A road stolen.
A morning stolen.
A harvest stolen.
A visit stolen.

A prayer delayed.
A funeral searched.
A wedding made late.
A child's bladder held
until humiliation learns the body.

The checkpoint is a school.
But the people learn more
than the checkpoint intended.

They learn patience with teeth.
They learn memory with boots.
They learn how to pass bread
through a system designed
to make bread suspicious.
They learn that dignity
isn't permission.

BOOK III: GAZA AS BODY

9. City With No Skin

Gaza has no skin left.

Every nerve is public.
Every wound has a microphone.
Every bedroom is a headline
if the signal survives.

The city stands exposed
under the surgical lamp of the world,

and still the world asks
whether the cut is real.

I've seen streets opened
like ribs.
I've seen dust rise
with family names inside it.
I have seen men dig
through their own histories
with bare hands,
calling into concrete
as if concrete were a stubborn relative.

Gaza isn't a place
on the edge of the sea.
Gaza is the question
God asks the century:
How much can you see
and still pretend
not to know?

Gaza is the child
whose face is gray with powdered house.
Gaza is the surgeon
operating by phone light.
Gaza is the journalist
recording his own grief
because no one else was left
to report it.
Gaza is the grandmother

who says alhamdulillah
with nothing in the pot
but steam and stubbornness.

Gaza has no skin left.

And still,
somewhere in the open nerve,
a mother braids her daughter's hair.
This isn't softness.
This is defiance
with fingers.

10. Hospital Psalm

Blessed are the exhausted doctors,
for they have seen the body of the world
and kept working.

Blessed are the nurses
who learned to hang mercy
from an empty hook.

Blessed are the fathers
holding IV bags above children
as if lifting lanterns for angels.

Blessed are the mothers
who whisper Qur'an into anesthesia
that never came.

Blessed are the hands
that press gauze into the place
where childhood was interrupted.

Blessed are the generators
that coughed until they died.
Blessed are the phones
held over wounds for light.
Blessed are the floors
that became beds.
Blessed are the corridors
that became wards.
Blessed are the names
written on arms
because the future had become uncertain
about faces.

Do not call this war
as if war were two armies
meeting cleanly in a field.

This is a hospital
trying to remain a hospital
while the sky keeps voting no.

This is medicine under siege.
This is the body pleading
with politics to become human.

God of the scalpel,
God of the sponge,
God of the broken oxygen tank,
God of the child too quiet,
enter here.

Not as miracle.
As witness.
As rage.
As the strength
of one more hand
refusing to stop.

11. The Bread Queue

The bread queue starts before dawn.

Nobody says revolution.
No one says history.
No one says international law.

They say flour.
They say water.
They say is the bakery still there.
They say I heard they bombed the road.
They say wait here.
They say hold my place.
They say if I don't return,
feed the little one first.

Hunger makes theology simple.
A loaf turns into scripture.
A bag of flour becomes a treaty.
A working oven becomes a republic.
A woman dividing bread
between five children
becomes the minister of justice.

Look closely.
This is where the world is judged.
Not in the parliament.
Not in the studio either.
Not under flags.

Here.
In the line.
Where the living wait
for the right not to become dead.

A boy carries bread home
as if carrying a newborn.
He holds it close to his chest.
He keeps looking up.
The sky has taught him
that even bread isn't safe
until it has reached the table.

I want every leader
who says difficult decisions
to stand in this queue
with an empty stomach
and a child behind him.

Let him explain strategy there.

12. Water Under Siege

Water is older than every flag.

It remembers the first throat.
It remembers the first garden.

It remembers the first mother
washing blood from birth.

And still men have found a way
to put water under siege.

The tap coughs.
The plastic bottle turns into treasure.
The child drinks less
so the baby can drink more.
The sea watches, useless with salt,
blue witness to a thirst
engineered by men who sleep beside fountains.

don't tell me civilization
while a people count droplets.

Do not tell me security
while a hospital boils rumor
and calls it clean.

Do not tell me ancient hatred.
This is modern plumbing.
This is policy in the pipe.
This is thirst with paperwork.

Somewhere a girl
holds a cup to her brother's mouth
and says slowly,
slowly,
like teaching him to pray.

Water should not need permission.
Rain should not need clearance.
A well should not be treated
like a weapons cache.

God made water free
and men built a checkpoint
inside the cloud.

BOOK IV: RELIGION IS NOT THE KNIFE

13. The Three Children of Abraham

The three children of Abraham
keep meeting at funerals.

One brings a psalm.
One brings a surah.
One brings a gospel.
All three bring mothers
who would rather have sons
than arguments.

Do not tell me God asked for this.

God did not need a tank
to defend His name.
God did not need a starving child
to prove a prophecy.
God did not need a holy city
to become a machine
for making widows.

The prophets came barefoot
through hunger,
through desert,
through empire,
through exile,
through prisons,
through whales,
through crosses,
through caves,
through fire,
through revelation trembling in the body.

They didn't come
so men could quote them
while children burn.

I've seen a Muslim guard a church key.
I've seen a Jew pray for a Palestinian child.
I have seen a Christian doctor kneel beside a Muslim mother.
I've also seen the scriptures behave better
in human hands
than in the mouths of leaders.

The three children of Abraham
are tired.

They sit at the same table.
they don't agree on everything.
Good.
Agreement isn't the same as mercy.

They pass bread.
that's where God begins again.

14. No God Asked for This

No God asked for this.

Not the God of Moses.
and not the God of Mary.
Not the God of Muhammad either.
Not the God who hears the monk.
Not the God who hears the rabbi.
Not the God who hears the widow
who has forgotten formal prayer
and only repeats please.

No God asked for white phosphorus
falling like a counterfeit Pentecost.

No God asked for snipers
near flour.

No God asked for children
numbered faster than named.

No God asked for a holy book
to be folded into a permit
for domination.

I know what men do.
They dress appetite as obedience.
They dress fear as faith.
They dress conquest as covenant.
They dress revenge as prophecy.

They dress land hunger
in the robes of heaven
and call the theft sacred.

But God is not fooled
by uniforms of language.

The divine knows the difference
between a prayer
and a war plan
whispered in religious grammar.

No God asked for this.

And if your god did,
then your god is only power
wearing borrowed light.

15. Sermon Against Holy Cruelty

Do not bring me a verse
with blood still wet on your hand.

Wash first.

Do not bring me doctrine
while the child is under rubble.
Dig first.

Do not bring me prophecy
while the mother is screaming.
Listen first.

Do not bring me heaven
while you make earth unlivable.
Repair first.

There are men who love religion
because it gives their cruelty
architecture.

There are men who love scripture
because an ancient sentence
can be made into a locked door.

There are men who love God
only when God sounds like permission.

I lose patience with them.

The true holy person
is easy to recognize.
He lowers his voice near grief.
She feeds before explaining.
They don't need everyone to become them
before they become merciful.

If your faith makes you less human,
return it.
You were sold a counterfeit.

If your prayer makes you indifferent
to a starving people,
start over.
The prayer didn't reach God.

It circled your ego
and came home.

16. The Key and the Candle

Some stories survive
because enemies failed to become enemies.

A key held by the unexpected hand.
A candle lit beside another's prayer.
A doorway opened
not by conquest
but by trust exhausted into wisdom.

This is the history they bury:
not only massacres,
not only betrayals,
not only the sharp archive of pain,
but also the small agreements
that kept heaven from collapsing.

A city is not holy
because men fight over it.
A city is holy
when strangers protect each other's dead.

A land isn't sacred
because one group shouts loudest.
A land is sacred
when the well is not poisoned
for the next family.

I keep a candle
for every hand
that refused the easy hatred.

I keep a key
for every door
that should have been opened
before the army arrived.

17. How a Boy Becomes a Flame

No child is born radicalized.

A child is born reaching.
For milk.
For warmth.
For the mother's face.
For the ridiculous mercy
of being held.

Then the world starts its lessons.

A home disappears.
A brother disappears.
A father comes back smaller.
A soldier laughs.
A checkpoint delays the ambulance.
A drone hums over homework.
A grandmother says the old village name
and everyone grows quiet.

A schoolmate turns into a photograph.
A politician calls it necessary.
A stranger online calls it deserved.

The boy keeps collecting sparks
because no one gives him water.

Do not act surprised
when the abandoned room catches fire.

I don't mean permission. I mean diagnosis.

If you don't want children to become flames,
stop making childhood out of kerosene.

Give him a field.
Give him a school with windows.
Give him a father who is not humiliated
in front of him.
Give him a future
that doesn't require martyrdom
to be noticed.
Give him a language
where dignity is not contraband.

A boy becomes a flame
when the world refuses
to let him be a boy.

18. The Leader Eats the Microphone

The leader eats the microphone
and calls it leadership.

He chews every question
until only applause stays.

He says peace
with a convoy behind him.
He says security
with hunger in his pocket.
He says civilization
while stepping over a body.
He says regret
and signs for more ammunition.

I've seen leaders
turn grief into furniture.
A podium from bones.
A flag from bandages.
A slogan from the last breath
of someone else's child.

The leader is never hungry.
That is how you know
he has misunderstood the war.

The leader sleeps.
That is how you know
he has not heard the mothers.

The leader has many names
and every century grows another one.
King.
President.
Minister.

General.
Protector.
Liberator.
Father of the Nation.
Servant of the People.

Listen closely.
If a man must keep telling you
he is saving you,
check who is missing.

19. Greed Has a Clean Suit

Greed doesn't always look like a monster.

Sometimes it has cufflinks.
Sometimes it smiles at conferences.
Sometimes it funds both the bomb
and the reconstruction contract.
Sometimes it discovers morality
near oil,
near ports,
near gas fields,
near trade routes,
near water,
near minerals,
near the next corridor
through someone else's ancestral land.

Greed has learned humanitarian language.
It says aid

while planning access.
It says stability
while choosing the puppet.
It says democracy
while counting the resource.
It says development
while pricing the rubble.

Do not ask why the poor keep dying
where the earth is rich.

Ask who profits
when a country breaks.

Ask who sells the weapon.
Ask who insures the shipment.
Ask who lends the money.
Ask who writes the report.
Ask who rebuilds the road
after helping choose the bomb
that destroyed it.

Greed has a clean suit.

Blood rarely reaches the boardroom,
but the boardroom reaches everywhere.

20. The Devil Wears Neutrality

The devil doesn't always shout.
Sometimes he moderates a panel.

He says both sides
when one side controls the water.

He says ancient hatred
when one side has modern aircraft.

He says cycle of violence
when the wheel has an engine,
a manufacturer,
a funder,
a pilot,
a target list.

He says pause
when he means continue quietly.

He says humanitarian corridor
as if the road itself
were not under the same sky
that made the corridor necessary.

Neutrality can be a mask
worn by cowardice
when courage becomes expensive.

I am not neutral
between the boot and the neck.
I am not neutral
between the cage and the child.
I am not neutral
between hunger and the hand
that locks the bakery.

I will be fair.
I will be careful.
I won't lie for my dead.

But I won't balance
a corpse
against the sentence
that killed it.

21. The Village Is Still Saying Its Name

They changed the sign.
The village kept its name.

They changed the map.
The grandmother kept the road.

They changed the language
of the archive.
The soil kept the footsteps.

They planted a new story
over the old cemetery.
The bones were not convinced.

Erasure is never complete.
It only becomes expensive
to remember.

So the people remember cheaply.
On napkins.

In lullabies.
In the way an old man points
with his whole hand
when speaking of a hill
he has not seen in fifty years.
In the recipes that carry
measurements like coordinates.
In the embroidery
where red thread becomes a village
without asking permission.

A name can survive
inside a daughter.
A key can survive
inside a drawer.
A house can survive
inside a smell.
A country can survive
inside the mouth
of a child born far away
who still says we are from there.

The village is still saying its name.

Listen.
Not everything destroyed
has agreed to disappear.

22. Archive of the Unreturned

The archive of the unreturned
is not in one building.

It is in the suitcase
that still smells of sea.
It is in the tin box
under the bed.
It is in the father's silence
whenever the old house is mentioned.
It is in the mother's necklace
sold twice and remembered forever.
It is in the photograph
with the corner missing
where someone's brother used to stand.
It is in the recipe
that begins,
Back home we used to...

Every refugee is forced
to become a librarian
of what power tried to burn.

The world says move on.
But where?

The road is fenced.
The border is sealed.
The house is occupied.
The grave is behind permission.

The orchard has new owners
who call the fruit discovery.

Move on, they say,
because they don't understand
that the wound is not behind us.

23. Erasure Has Good Grammar

Erasure has good grammar; it knows passive voice.

Homes were demolished.
Children were killed.
Aid was delayed.
Shots were fired.
Bodies were found.
Mistakes were made.

By whom?
Grammar looks away.

Erasure loves abstractions.
Tension.
Clashes.
Escalation.
Security concerns.
Demographic balance.
Operational necessity.

Erasure knows how to make
a screaming mother
sound like a weather report.

So I come back to the verb.
Someone demolished.
Someone killed.
Someone delayed.
Someone fired.
Someone found.
Someone made the mistake
and someone paid for it
with a child.

The moral life begins
when grammar stops hiding the hand.

24. The Grandmother Is the Archive

The grandmother is the archive.

Not the university.
Not the ministry either.
Not the locked room
where papers go to become obedient.

The grandmother.

She remembers which tree
leaned toward the well.
She remembers the neighbor
who borrowed salt and never returned the bowl.
She remembers the wedding song
interrupted by soldiers.
She remembers the bread oven.
She remembers the first exile meal.

She remembers who carried the key.
She remembers who lost a shoe.
She remembers which cousin
said we will be back by Friday.

Her memory has no footnotes,
but it has scars.

When she dies,
a library burns quietly.

So sit with her.
Record nothing at first.
Just listen.
Let her speak in circles.
Circles are how grief protects the center.

Ask her about the land.
She will tell you about figs.
Ask her about the war.
She will tell you about your uncle's laugh.
Ask her about return.
She will look toward the door.

The grandmother is the archive.
And the archive is tired
of being called nostalgia.

25. The Refugee Becomes a Suitcase

The refugee becomes a suitcase
because the world prefers objects
to obligations.

Inside him:
a street,
a language,
a mother boiling lentils,
a brother lost at a crossing,
a schoolyard,
a prayer rug,
a court order,
a scar,
a joke that doesn't translate,
a dead father who keeps walking
beside the bus.

At the border,
they ask for documents.

He wants to open his chest
and say:
Here.
Here is the village.
Here is the bomb.
Here is the reason.
Here is the night we left.

Here is the child I was
before history packed me.

But borders do not read hearts.
They read stamps.

So he becomes smaller.
He folds the country
into the body.
He learns new weather.
He learns the word refugee
in a language
that didn't exist in his childhood.

One day his daughter
will speak beautifully
in the tongue of exile.
She will ask him
why he still keeps the key.

He will say:
Because metal remembers
what maps deny.

26. Camp Lullaby

Sleep, little lantern.
The tent is only pretending
to be a sky.

Sleep, little bird.
The fence is only pretending
to be the edge of the world.

Sleep, little sea.
Your father is standing in line
for papers that can't measure him.

Sleep, little olive.
Your mother has hidden tomorrow
inside a pot of lentils.

The camp coughs.
The generator stutters.
Rain enters through the seam
where the night keeps touching us.
Someone argues.
Someone prays.
Someone remembers a house so clearly
that for one second
the whole tent smells of jasmine.

Sleep, little witness.
You were born after the exile
but exile was born before you.

I will sing you the road backward.
I'll sing you the well.
I will sing you the door.
I will sing you the tree
until even your dreams
know where to return.

27. Diaspora With a Broken Compass

Exile can make a person holy.
It can also make him dangerous.

Distance sharpens love,
but it can also sharpen fantasy.

I have heard people
safe in clean apartments
ask for fire
in the place they claim to miss.

Brother,
don't love the homeland
as an idea so pure
that the living become inconvenient.

Sister,
don't turn return
into a throne built from other people's funerals.

The country is not a symbol
waiting for your perfect speech.
It is your cousin
who still waits in line.
It is your aunt
who still knows which medicine is missing.
It is the neighbor
who still fixes the door after each blast.

If you are far away,
don't send slogans only.
Send school fees.

Send legal help.
Send translation.
Send medicine.
Send pressure.
Send truth.
Send the dignity
of not speaking over the ones
who stayed.

A broken compass
still points somewhere.
Before you follow it,
ask who will bleed
when you arrive.

28. Condemnation Is Easy From a Warm Room

Condemnation is easy
from a warm room.

The chair supports you.
The glass is full.
The lights work.
The door opens
without permission from a teenager
holding a rifle.

You say:
Violence is wrong.

Yes.

You say:
Civilians must be protected.

Yes.

You say:
There must be peace.

Yes.

But if peace means
that the prisoner turns into quieter,
if protection means
that one child gets a shelter
and another gets an explanation,
if wrong means
only the scream of the occupied
and never the architecture
that taught him screaming,
then your condemnation
isn't morality.

It is insulation.

don't ask the starving
to speak like diplomats.
don't ask the bombed
to organize their grief
for your comfort.
don't ask the dispossessed
to prove their humanity

by blessing the system
that dispossessed them.

Condemn all killing.
Good.
Now condemn the cage.

29. The World Wants a Perfect Victim

The world wants a perfect victim.

Quiet.
Educated.
Bleeding, but not angry.
Dead, but not political.
Grieving, but grateful for attention.
Oppressed, but fluent in the oppressor's fear.

The perfect victim thanks the camera.
The perfect victim condemns on schedule.
The perfect victim doesn't mention history
unless history has been shortened
to fit the segment.

The perfect victim
never scares the sponsor.

But real victims are human.
They rage.
They contradict themselves.
They pray badly.
They curse.
They become numb.

They make mistakes.
They love people they should have left.
They hate people they should not hate.
They survive in ways
that don't photograph well.

Oppression doesn't produce saints.
It produces wounds.

Do not demand holiness
from a people
while denying them water.

If you need the victim perfect
before you oppose the crime,
you are not against oppression.
You are against being inconvenienced
by its image.

30. All Children Means All Children

All children means all children; say it until politics runs out of tricks.

The child in the kibbutz.
The child in the camp.
The child in the shelter.
The child in the rubble.
The child taken.
The child buried.
The child afraid of rockets.
The child afraid of jets.

The child whose nightmare speaks Hebrew.
The child whose nightmare speaks Arabic.
The child whose mother will never be convinced
that her loss is a statistic
inside someone else's argument.

All children means all children.

If your compassion stops at a border,
it isn't compassion.
It is tribal weather.

If your grief requires matching flags,
it is not grief.
It is recruitment.

I will not let anyone
teach me selective mourning.

I can hold more than one dead child
inside my conscience.
The heart is not a government office.
It does not need to deny one file
to process another.

All children means all children.

And because all children means all children,
no child should be used
to justify the killing of another child.
Not one.
and not ever.
Not with scripture either.

Not with trauma.
Not with history.
Not with security.
Not with revenge.
Not with a flag over the coffin.

BOOK IX: HISTORY REPEATS

31. AGAIN

Again,
the trains of language arrive
before the trains of bodies.

Again,
men call a people problem.

Again,
the powerful discover numbers
as a way to hide faces.

Again,
children are sorted into acceptable
and unfortunate.

Again,
newspapers learn to whisper
when the dead belong
to the wrong grief.

Again,
the world says never again
with one hand

and signs the shipment
with the other.

Again,
the scholar explains context.
Again,
the minister explains necessity.
Again,
the general explains precision.
Again,
the mother explains nothing
because she is holding a shoe.

History repeats
because the powerful memorize excuses
and the comfortable memorize distance.

But the dead memorize us.

They are writing our names down
in a book without borders.
One day the question will not be
what did you know?

The question will be:
What did your knowing become?

32. The Museum of Future Shame

One day there will be a museum.

Children will walk through it
holding clean audio guides.
They will see photographs

of neighborhoods flattened
into gray geography.
They will see the tiny shoes.
They will see the hospital lists.
They will see the journalists
who reported until the report
became obituary.

A soft voice in their headphones will say:
The international community failed.

Failed.

What a gentle word
for a room full of preventable dead.

The children will ask
their teachers:
How did people let this happen?

The teachers will speak of complexity.
They will speak of fear.
They will speak of propaganda.
They will speak of alliances.
They will speak of money.
They will speak of racism
without using the word too loudly.
They will speak of fatigue.

Nobody will say:
They saw it on their phones
between lunch and sleep

and many did nothing
because nothing was easier.
I am writing for that museum now.
I am leaving this sentence
on the wall:
They were alive when you debated them.

33. The Archive of Excuses

The archive of excuses
is larger than the archive of names.
We didn't know.
We knew too little.
We knew too much.
The situation was complex.
The timing was delicate.
The ally was important.
The enemy was worse.
The numbers were disputed.
The images were unverified.
The language was inflammatory.
The history was ancient.
The victims were imperfect.
The market was nervous.
The election was close.
The donor was powerful.
The institution was cautious.
The statement was being drafted.

Meanwhile,
the child died in present tense.
No committee can resurrect him.
No revised language
can put milk back in his mouth.
No later regret
can return the morning
to the family that lost it.
The archive of excuses
will burn cleanly.
it's made of paper.

34. Chorus for the Unburied

Verse 1
I saw the moon over Gaza
wearing dust like a veil.
I saw a father ask concrete
why love had to fail.
I saw the sea hold its water
like a witness in chains.
I saw the children draw windows
on the walls of their pain.

Pre-Chorus
Do not tell me it is over.
Do not tell me to be still.
There are names beneath the morning.
There are hearts beneath the hill.

Chorus
We are here, we are here,
we are breath against the smoke.

We are here, we are here,
we are the promise that never broke.
If the house falls down,
we become the road.
If the road burns black,
we carry the load.
We are here, we are here,
and the dead are not alone.

Verse II
I heard the world say later
with its hand on the door.
I heard the mothers say never,
not one child more.
I heard the bread line singing
through a throat full of sand.
I heard a boy call tomorrow
with a stone in his hand.

Bridge
The fire has owners.
The bombs have names.
The orders came signed.
The weapons came numbered.
No child wrote them.
No lullaby armed them.
The wound is open
and running out of time.

Final Chorus

We are here, we are here,

we are breath against the smoke.

We are here, we are here,

we are the promise that never broke.

If the night gets loud,

we become the song.

If the dawn comes late,

we keep walking on.

We are here, we are here,

and the dead aren't alone.

35. Olive Tree Anthem

Verse I
They cut me down in winter,
said the root would disappear.
But I had been underground
for seven hundred years.
I knew the Roman bootprint.
I knew the empire's knife.
I knew the names of children
who hid inside my life.

Chorus
I am the olive tree,
older than their claim.
I have tasted every fire
and still remember rain.
Cut me, I will answer.
Burn me, I will green.
I am not your battlefield.
I am what survives between.

Verse II
A grandmother touched my branches
and whispered, Not yet, not yet.
A soldier marked my shadow
but could not make me forget.
A boy once tied a ribbon
where the harvest used to start.
Now every leaf is witness.
Now every fruit is heart.

Chorus
I am the olive tree,
older than their claim.
I have tasted every fire
and still remember rain.
Cut me, I will answer.
Burn me, I will green.
I am not your battlefield.
I am what survives between.

Outro
When the last wall crumbles,
when the last gate rusts,
I will still be standing
with my roots full of dust.

36. Not a Number

Hook

I am not a number.

I am not a file.

I was someone's morning.

I was someone's child.

Verse I
Do not stack me in the thousands
like a wall of unnamed stone.
I had a favorite color.
I had a way of coming home.
I had a cup with a crack in it.
I had a song I sang off-key.
I had a mother who could find me
in any crowd by breath alone.

Hook

I am not a number.

I am not a file.

I was someone's morning.

I was someone's child.

Verse II
If you must count me,
count the bread I did not finish.
Count the games I never played.
Count the books still in my schoolbag.
Count the prayers my father prayed.
Count the window I looked out of.
Count the dust that took my name.
Count the world that saw me leaving
and still continued just the same.

Hook

I am not a number.

I am not a file.

I was someone's morning.

I was someone's child.

37. The Child Draws a Window

The child draws a window
on the wall of the shelter.

No glass.
No view.
Only crayon
and the stubborn intelligence of hope.

Inside the square,
she draws a tree.
Inside the tree,
a bird.
Inside the bird,
a sky.
Inside the sky,
a sun too yellow
for the actual morning.

Someone asks her
why the window has no bars.

She looks confused.

Why would I draw a prison,
she says,
when I already have one?

This is why they fear children.
Not because children are innocent.

Innocence can be killed.
They fear children
because children keep inventing exits.

A city can be sealed.
A border can be closed.
A permit can be denied.
A wall can be raised.

But a child with a crayon
can place a window
where power insisted
there was only concrete.

I kneel beside her.
I ask if I may enter.

She says yes,
but wipe the dust from your feet.
This is a clean sky.

38. Bread After the Bomb

After the bomb,
someone looks for bread.

This is the most human sentence
I know.

Not revenge.
Not theory.
Not geopolitics.
Bread.

The body returns
to its oldest argument:
I am still here.
Feed me.

A woman finds half a bag of flour
under a broken shelf
and becomes the founder
of civilization again.

She mixes it with water
that should have been cleaner.
She lights a fire
from splintered furniture.
She pats the dough
with hands that were shaking
an hour ago.

The children gather.
The first smell rises.
For one second,
the war is not gone,
but it is interrupted.

Bread after the bomb
is not a small thing.

It is the soul saying:
You may destroy the roof,
but you have not yet destroyed
the table.

39. The Sea Refuses Despair

The sea refuses despair.
It keeps arriving.

Every wave comes back
though the shore has witnessed
too much leaving.

The fishermen know this.
The children know this.
The dead know this.
Even the blockade knows this
and hates the sea for it.

You can fence a road.
You can close a crossing.
You can number a body.
You can rename a village.

But the sea keeps making
the same blue argument:
Nothing belongs to you forever.

At night,
when the city can't sleep,
the sea speaks in broken silver.
It says:
I carried prophets.
I carried refugees.
I carried traders.
I carried armies.
I carried the drowned.

I carried the lucky.
I carried the lost.
I've seen empire after empire
practice walking on water
and fail.

Do not let the night
convince you it invented darkness.

The sea refuses despair; so must I.

40. The Ones Who Stayed

Bless the ones who stayed.

Not because leaving was cowardice.
Sometimes leaving is survival.
Sometimes leaving is obedience
to the mother's last command.
Sometimes leaving is the only way
the family name reaches tomorrow.

But bless the ones who stayed.

The teacher who opened school
under a sky that hated attendance.
The baker who returned to the oven.
The doctor who slept in the corridor.
The farmer who touched each tree
as if counting children.
The journalist who kept filming
after grief entered his own house.
The imam who prayed over pieces

and did not let despair lead the prayer.
The neighbor who shared rice
until sharing became arithmetic
and arithmetic became miracle.

The ones who stayed
are not statues.
They are tired.
They are afraid.
They are sometimes angry
at the wrong person.
They sometimes envy the dead
for being beyond decisions.

Still,
they stay.

And because they stay,
the land is not only occupied.
It is inhabited.
It is answered.
It is loved back
under fire.

BOOK XII: SERMON TO THE WORLD

41. MAKE NO MISTAKE

Make no mistake.

This is not about a people.
A people can't be born criminal.

A child can't inherit a tank.
A grandmother does not speak
with a minister's mouth.
A synagogue is not a settlement.
A Jewish prayer is not a bomb.
A Hebrew lullaby is not a law
that steals water.

Make no mistake.

This is about power.
This is about land.
This is about occupation.
This is about a people being asked
to disappear politely.
This is about grief being cross-examined
before it is allowed to be human.
This is about leaders
who know the price of every missile
and the value of no child.
This is about empires
that keep discovering morality
only when morality serves their corridor.
This is about the old disease:
men thinking God gave them the earth
because they learned how to take it.

Make no mistake.

I do not want revenge.
Revenge is too small
for this many graves.

I want the machinery stopped.
I want the children fed.
I want the prisoners named.
I want the walls questioned.
I want the refugees heard.
I want the dead honored.
I want the living free.
I want the word peace
to stop being used
as a pillow over the mouth
of justice.

Make no mistake.

The truth is raw
because the wound is raw.
If you wanted gentle language,
you should have stopped the bomb
before it entered the nursery.

42. A Sermon With Dust in Its Teeth

People of the world,
what will you do
with all this seeing?

You have seen the father
lift his child from dust.

You have seen the mother
kiss a forehead gone cold.
You have seen the boy
whose eyes learned sirens
before multiplication.
You have seen the girl
writing her name on her arm
because identification
became a bedtime ritual.
You have seen the doctor
break and keep working.
You have seen the journalist
become the story.
You have seen the city
turned into a lesson
no decent species should need twice.

What will you do
with all this seeing?

Do not tell me you are powerless.
Powerlessness is often comfort
wearing poor clothes.

You have a mouth.
Use it.
You have hands.
Use them.
You have money.
Move it.

You have leaders.
Pressure them.
You have institutions.
Disrupt their sleep.
You have children.
Teach them to name the hand that acts
and never turn a people into the act.
You have grief.
Do not let it become theater.
Make it useful.

The world isn't changed
by pity alone.
Pity watches from the balcony.
Love comes down the stairs
and opens the door.

Come down.
The street is full of names.

43. If I Must End in Hope

If I must end in hope,
let it not be the cheap kind.

Not the poster hope.
Not the candlelight hope
that photographs well
and changes nothing.
Not the hope that tells the oppressed

to endure beautifully
while the oppressor reloads.

Give me a hope with dirt under its nails.
A hope that has carried bodies
and still plants mint.
A hope that has seen the hospital list
and still teaches the alphabet.
A hope that doesn't deny the grave
but refuses to let the grave
write the final sentence.

My hope isn't optimism.
It is obligation.

The olive tree obligates me.
The child drawing a window obligates me.
The grandmother holding the key obligates me.
The sea returning each morning obligates me.
The bread after the bomb obligates me.
The dead, who can't speak,
place their silence in my mouth
and obligate me.

So yes,
I hope.

Not because the world is good.
Because the world is unfinished.

Not because justice is guaranteed.
Because injustice is loud
and must be answered.

Not because Palestine is a symbol.
Because Palestine is people.
And people,
against all evidence,
keep becoming dawn.

EPILOGUE

WHAT I MEAN WHEN I SAY FREE

When I say free,
I do not mean revenge.

I mean the child sleeps
without studying the sky.

I mean the mother stops writing names
on small wrists.

I mean the farmer reaches his trees
without a permit
from a stranger younger than his grief.

I mean the refugee visits the grave
without needing a miracle
from bureaucracy.

I mean the prisoner is counted
as more than a bargaining chip.

I mean the leader cannot hide
a dead child inside the word security.

I mean every person stands apart from the machinery
and every system stays open to judgment.

I mean the synagogue stands.
The mosque stands.
The church stands.
The unbeliever stands.
The widow stands.
The orphan stands.
The olive tree stands.
The law stands only if it protects
the one with no army.

I mean land back to life.
Water back to throat.
Bread back to table.
Name back to body.
History back to truth.
God back to mercy.

I mean the end of the machine
that teaches children
to measure distance by danger.

I mean the beginning
of a morning
where no one has to become a martyr
to be seen as human.

That is what I mean.
Free.

ADDENDUM

THE LOTUS OF THE ASH

A Short Interfaith Prayer-Cycle for Grief, Faith, and Joy
I don't bring these prayers as decoration. I bring them as water.

I bring them for the parent with no grave to visit, for the child whose name turned into smoke, for the people asked to prove their humanity while the cameras adjusted their light. I bring them because grief needs more than argument. It needs a room. It needs a bowl. It needs a hand on the back. It needs a God large enough to hear every language at once.

No people is born condemned.
No scripture was written to make a child disposable.
Power must answer for what power does.

If there is a holy ark left in this century, let it be made of prayers from every shore. Let it carry the wounded through the flood. Let it refuse the old lie that one people must vanish so another may feel chosen.

I. Prayer Before the Flower Opens

Lord of the first breath,
God before names,

Mercy before doctrine,
listen.

I have carried too much ash in my mouth.
I've also watched the world become fluent in excuses.
I've also watched men count the dead
as if counting could become compassion.

Give me one clean word.
Not victory.
Not revenge either.
Not explanation.

Give me morning.
Give me the courage to believe
that a flower can rise
from a field that forgot the color green.

II. Prayer for the Parents Who Have No Answer

For the mother pressing a shirt to her face.
For the father holding a birth certificate
as if paper could bring back breath.
For the grandmother who keeps cooking
because grief doesn't know what else to do with hands.

God of every cradle,
sit with them.
don't preach too soon.
don't send comfort wearing clean shoes.
Come barefoot.

Come dusty.
Come with silence large enough
for the scream that has not ended.

If heaven has doors,
leave them open tonight.
If the dead can hear us,
let them hear their names spoken gently.
If mercy is real,
let it begin with the ones
who were forced to bury tomorrow.

III. A Jewish Prayer for the Names

God of the covenant,
God of the wrestlers,
God who heard slaves cry beneath empire,
write no people out of Your book.

Let no one use old wounds
as permission to make new ones.
And let no one turn ancestral grief
into a weapon against another child.
Let no one confuse survival
with domination.

Teach us the holiness of names.
Teach us that a name is not a border.
Teach us that memory must not become a throne.

Bless every house where candles are lit
for peace and not for pride.

Bless every trembling hand
that refuses hatred inherited like furniture.
Bless the one who says:
My safety can't require your erasure.

IV. A Muslim Prayer at Fajr

Ya Rahman,
Most Merciful,
before the sun lifts its face,
I place these names before You.

The hungry.
The buried.
The missing.
The ones under concrete.
The ones still breathing
beside the ones who stopped.

You know what the world edits.
You know what the generals rename.
You know every child
before the headline comes.

Make my prayer more than sound.
Make it bread.
Make it witness.
Make it a hand pulling another hand
from smoke.

Do not let me bow
then rise empty.

Do not let my forehead touch earth
while my heart refuses the wounded.
Ameen.

V. A Christian Prayer Beneath the Broken Wood

God of the executed innocent,
God of the body exposed to empire,
God of the mother watching from below,
don't let us worship suffering
while ignoring the suffering in front of us.

The cross is not jewelry
if the child is still under rubble.
The empty tomb is not doctrine
if we can't roll one stone away.
The resurrection is not a song
if it does not make us dangerous to despair.

Teach me to carry love
without making it soft.
Teach me to forgive
without excusing the nail.
Teach me to believe in rising
without rushing the dead.

Let every scar become a window,
not a flag.

VI. A Buddhist Prayer for the Bowl

May the frightened breathe.
May the angry see the root of their anger.
May the grieving be held without being hurried.
May the hungry find rice.
May the soldier remember he was once a child.
May the leader remember he will become dust.
May the refugee sleep one whole night
without hearing the old door break.

I place the world inside an empty bowl.
Not to possess it.
To see how fragile it is.

Every life leans into every life.
Every scream enters the air of the listener.
No one suffers alone,
though power loves to arrange it that way.

May compassion become action.
May action become shelter.
May shelter become a country
where no one has to earn mercy.

VII. A Hindu Prayer by the River of Many Names

O river of many names,
carry what we can't carry.
Carry the ash,
the rumor,
the broken idol,

the argument between brothers,
the map with its arrogant lines.

Teach me the soul isn't small.
Teach me the body is sacred
because it is where breath learns consequence.
Teach me that duty without love
becomes another machine.

If the world is a wheel,
let it turn toward justice.
If the heart is a battlefield,
let courage stand without hatred.
If the Divine wears many faces,
let me recognize the hungry one first.

VIII. A Sikh Prayer for the Shared Kitchen

Let there be a kitchen
at the end of every war.
And let the pots be larger
than the slogans.
Let the bread be passed
before the questions.

Let the rich sit beside the poor
until both remember the same hunger.
And let the stranger eat first.
And let the widow take food home.
Let the child with dust in his hair
be served without being photographed.

God of service,
make my hands useful.
Make my pride small.
Make my table longer
than my fear.

If I can't stop the empire today,
let me feed someone
it tried to erase.

IX. A Zoroastrian Prayer for the Fire

Fire of truth,
don't let me become warm
beside a lie.

Burn the false word from my mouth.
Burn the clean excuse.
Burn the sentence that makes killing sound necessary.
Burn the cowardice that hides inside neutrality
when a people is being crushed.

Good thought.
Good word.
Good deed.

Let this not be a slogan.
Let it be a knife against my hypocrisy.
Let it be a lamp in the court of power.
Let it be a small sun
inside the chest of the exhausted.

Where the lie builds a throne,
let truth arrive barefoot
and still be brighter.

X. A Baha'i Prayer for the One Garden

God of the one garden,
forgive us for loving our flowers
more than the soil.

We divided Your rain by tribe.
We gave the sun a passport.
We built fences around fragrance
and called the thorn holy.

Teach us the oneness
that doesn't flatten difference.
Teach us unity
without erasure.
Teach us peace
that is stronger than politeness.

Let religion become a bridge again.
Let science become humility.
Let justice become daily bread.
Let humanity stop behaving
like a family that has forgotten
the house is burning.

XI. Prayer Against the False Peace

Do not give me peace
that is only the silence of the buried.
Do not give me peace
that asks the oppressed to whisper.
Do not give me peace
that washes the uniform
but not the blood.

Give me the peace
that comes back the key.
Give me the peace
that names the stolen house.
Give me the peace
that lets the child walk home
without becoming a target.

I won't bless the quiet
if the quiet was purchased
with someone else's disappearance.

Real peace has witnesses.
Real peace has receipts.
Real peace knocks on every locked door
until the missing are counted.

XII. Joy After the Last Grave

And still,
I choose joy.

Not the joy of forgetting.
Not the joy sold in bright packages either.
Not the joy that steps over the wounded
because the music is loud.

I choose the joy
of bread arriving hot.
The joy of a child laughing
with her whole missing country in her throat.
The joy of rain on tents.
The joy of a doctor sleeping.
The joy of a father finding one photograph.
The joy of a mother planting mint
beside a wall that may not stand.

I choose the joy
that makes tyrants nervous:
people singing after the decree,
people marrying after the ruin,
people teaching the alphabet
inside the camp,
people saying tomorrow
as if tomorrow were a guest
already walking up the road.

Blessed are the scarred
who still prepare a table.
Blessed are the grieving
who still leave room for laughter.
Blessed are the living

who refuse to let death
be the final author.

Let the lotus open.
And let the children wake.
And let the bread rise.
Let the bells, the adhan, the shofar,
the temple drum, the quiet breath,
the river, the fire, the kitchen,
and the one garden
answer each other.

Let joy come last.
Not because grief was false.
Because grief was loved
all the way through.

End of Addendum

The Names That Would Not Break

I have lived long enough to know that not every chain makes noise.

Some are tied before language. Some are braided into milk, lullaby, passport, border, schoolbook, accent, family silence, and the salt at the edge of a mother's mouth.

Some chains arrive wearing uniforms. Some arrive wearing kinship. Some arrive as paperwork. Some arrive nameless, like wind under a locked door.

For years I called it weather. Bad luck. A season of heavy doors. But the soul is a patient investigator. It gathers fingerprints from dreams. It keeps evidence in the bones. It waits until the tongue is brave enough to say:

I know you now. I know where you touched me. I know what you tried to make of my life.

THE FIRST KNOT: THE NAME THEY TOOK

The first knot was tied at the mouth.

They changed the village into a problem. They changed the mother into a figure. They changed the child into a statistic. They changed the dead into context. They changed hunger into insecurity. They changed stolen into disputed. They changed grief into tension.

Every empire starts by teaching language to behave.

But a name is not a decoration. A name is a house with breath inside it. A name is the last cup on the table. A name is the door that refuses to become wall.

So I return the names to the living. Child. Mother. Worker. Farmer. Prisoner. Orphan. Elder. Witness. Beloved. Human.

The first knot loosens when the stolen word comes home.

THE SECOND KNOT: THE HOUSE THAT SWALLOWED THE CRY

The second knot was tied inside the house.

Not every silence is peace. Some silence is a room trained to hide the wound. Some silence is a family altar built around the thing no one can name. Some silence is a child learning to become convenient.

I bless the houses that survived by whispering. I don't worship the whisper.

Let the cupboard open. Let the old photograph speak. Let the mother sit. Let the father put down the myth of his own strength. Let the child stop carrying weather that started before his birth.

A house isn't healed because it's quiet; it's healed when truth can walk from room to room without being mistaken for fire.

The second knot loosens when the cry is allowed to become language.

THE THIRD KNOT: THE NAMELESS PRESSURE

The third knot has no portrait. That is why it frightens us longest.

No uniform. No signature. No witness. Only a tilt in the corridor of the day. A door closing too early. A hand

missing the hand it was meant to hold. A life bent by forces that never bothered to introduce themselves.

But even a nameless shadow must obey the law of dawn. Even fog has limits. Even the unspoken can be released if the living refuse to build a house around it.

Unknown hand, I name you without knowing you. Phantom pressure, I release you without understanding you. World-weight, accident, inherited weather: you may have touched the road, but you do not own the journey.

The third knot loosens when the soul stops calling heaviness destiny.

THE BREAKING OF THE KNOTS

By breath, by bread, by the ground that remembers every buried child, by water that carries names past borders, I speak to the chains:

First knot, born of renaming, loosen. Let the word come back to the body it was taken from.

Second knot, born of silence, loosen. Let the house learn the grammar of repair.

Third knot, born of nameless pressure, loosen. Let the unknown dissolve into weather and pass.

You are no longer housed in me. You are no longer fed by my fear. You are no longer written into the grammar of my future.

I close the door without hatred. I open the window without fear.

CLOSING HYMN: THE HOUSE AFTER THE CHAIN

God of gutters and galaxies, God of mothers washing blood from porches, God of fathers who arrive late and still ask to be useful, God of children whose names outlive smoke: hold us now.

Not as perfect people. As released people.

Let no harm find the old road back. Let no darkness mistake our silence for permission. Let no curse survive the morning we have chosen.

We stand with bread in one hand and flame in the other.

We stand with the dead. We stand with the living breath. We stand with the names that would not break.

I am not untouched. I am not unscarred. But I am whole enough to open the door. I am whole enough to bless the room. I am whole enough to wake.

What can't be named keeps ruling the room.
And nothing can hold what has remembered its own name.

We Are Still Here

A Country Is Not Its Crown

A country isn't its crown.

it's the woman buying tomatoes before the heat rises.
it's the boy carrying medicine through a street that has changed names three times.
it's the barber who knows which songs make old men cry.
it's the schoolyard where chalk dust becomes a parliament by noon.

A country is not the general.
It is the mother who hides the radio when the children sleep.
It is the auntie who saves sugar for guests she can't afford.
It is the mechanic who fixes the same bus every winter because the village still needs somewhere to go.

Do not bring me a flag and call it a people.
Do not bring me a ruler and call him a nation.
Do not bring me a headline and call it history.

I've seen countries survive their governments
by passing bread through windows.
I've seen people outlive empires
by remembering the recipe.
I have seen children inherit ruins
and still draw suns on the wall.

A crown can fall.
A palace can burn.
A border can learn to lie.
But a people is harder to kill
than the story told about them.

Through the Weather of Rumor

To see a people clearly,
you must look through weather
that didn't come from the sky.
Rumor.
Sanction.
Fear.
Old prejudice.
The fog of foreign experts
who never learned the smell
of the morning market.
Through it,
a hand appears.
Then tea.
Then a joke.
Then a story told twice
because the first telling
was for politeness
and the second was true.

Every map is poor.
A map can't show hospitality.
A map can't show
the private kindness
that survives public cruelty.
A map can't show
how a city breathes
when the cameras leave.

I trust the table
more than the briefing.

--

Stone Does Not Forget

The old stones don't perform grief.
They simply remain.

Palaces burn.
Banners rot.
The men who believed
time belonged to them
are now dust
inside time's patient mouth.

But stone stays behind
like a witness
who refuses applause.

It says:
The throne was not the country.

The conqueror was not the century.
The gate was not the garden.

A people is not defeated
because one roof falls.
A people turns into weather.
A people becomes language
moving through another empire's mouth.
A people becomes bread,
poem,
recipe,
name,
handwriting,
child.

Stone remembers this.
So do mothers.

--

The Board on Our Backs

Someone placed a board on our backs
while we were bent over surviving.

They called it strategy.
They moved kings across our shoulders,
queens across our ribs,
priests across our lungs.

We thought the weight was adulthood.
We thought the hand pressing down
was only how the world worked.

Then one worker coughed.
One mother shifted.
One child asked,
Why are we kneeling?

That is how games end.
Not always with fire.
Sometimes with a spine
remembering its first instruction:
stand.

When the people rise,
the pieces lose their kingdom.
The carved horses fall silent.
The board slides into dust.

And the backs
that held the game
become roads.

--

More Moves in the Body

You can lose almost everything
and still not be finished.

A house gone.
A friend gone.
A language made difficult
in the new country.
A plan split open
on the kitchen floor.

Still the body asks:
Where is the breath?

Not the pride.
Not the title either.
Not the applause.
Not the money
that walked away
wearing someone else's shoes.

Where is the part of you
that can still move?

There.
Small.
Stubborn.
Under the ribs.

The self not yet captured.
The breath not yet purchased.
The little king of pulse
standing in the ruins.

More moves.

--

The Trial of a Small Nation

Imagine a man in court
with a country folded
inside his jacket.

No empire beside him.
No company praying
for the people's victory.
No foreign newspaper ready
to call dignity reasonable.

He says:
The ground gave this to us.
The room hears:
Danger.

He says:
The people should eat
from their own earth.
The room hears:
Markets are afraid.

He says:
A nation is not a pipeline
with a flag attached.
The room hears:
Remove the voice.

When argument fails,
power buys noise.
It manufactures crowds.
It teaches betrayal
to wear local clothing.

Years later,
the grandchildren inherit the fire

and are told the fire
began by itself.

No.
The match had a passport.

--

Exile With Clean Hands

I've seen exile
grow strange in the mouth.
A man leaves the burning house,
finds shelter,
learns the language of the shelter,
builds a clean life
far from smoke.

Then one day
he points at the old house
and asks someone else
to bomb it open
so he can return
through the ashes.

Brother,
what kind of homecoming is that?

The homeland isn't a locked box
to be opened by missiles.
It is the cousin who never left.
It is the student

studying under pressure.
It is the aunt in line.
It is the mother
making dinner
while history screams outside.

Send books.
Send medicine.
Send tools.
Send yourself if you must.

Do not send fire
from a safe apartment.

--

A House for Memory

The children of exile
become excellent.

Doctors.
Engineers.
Lawyers.
Teachers.
Builders of clean lives
inside countries
that never fully learned
the shape of their names.

They buy houses.
They master systems.
They speak faster.

They laugh politely
when someone calls their food strange.

But where is the house
for memory?

Where is the room
for photographs in shoeboxes?
Where is the table
where the old men teach games
without being treated like folklore?
Where is the wall
where the grandmother's journey
isn't a private burden
but a public inheritance?

A people can become wealthy
and still be homeless
if memory has no address.

--

The Oil Country After the Cameras

Do not ask only
whether the fallen ruler
was good or evil.
That is the lazy question.

Ask who ate after the fall.
Ask who drank.
Ask who bought the pieces.

Ask who renamed the breaking
as mercy from the sky.

Ask why a country with oil
became a country of ruins.
Ask why the road forgot its purpose.
Ask why the water stopped arriving.
Ask why bodies were traded again
in the century that congratulates itself
for abolishing chains.

Do not make saints of men.
Do not make devils
because the powerful
handed you a script.

The dead deserve complexity.
The living deserve water.

--

Orbit of Dignity

A satellite can be a prayer
made of metal.

Not because machines are holy,
but because a grandmother
can call across a continent
without paying rent
to the old gatekeepers.

A student calls home.
A clinic sends records.
A trader speaks to family.
A language crosses the sky
without asking permission
from the former master.

Sometimes development
isn't a parade.
It is a signal.
It is a light in a school.
It is a hospital stocked.
It is a mother turning on power
so the child can read after sunset.

Dignity sometimes enters orbit
before it reaches the ground.

--

Light for the Page

Give the people light
and they will read.

Give them books
and they will ask questions.
Give them time
and they will become difficult
to govern badly.

That's why greed hates the light.
Not because the light shines,

but because the child beneath it
may learn where the money went.

A father comes home
after a long day
and still has enough electricity
to read one page
to his son.

Do not call this small.
This is civilization
without costume.

A room.
A bulb.
A book.
A voice.
A child leaning closer
to the future.

--

The Table Is Still a Rebellion

they don't want you
with your family at lunch.
They want you in traffic.

They don't want aunties
arguing over tea
while children sleep
on someone's coat.
They want separate households,

separate bills,
separate screens,
separate loneliness.

A lonely person buys more.
A tired person orders more.
A person cut from family
becomes easier to rent back
to themselves.

This is the farm:
not soil,
not wheat,
not cattle,
but people.

Raised in units.
Fed advertisements.
Milked for attention.
Sold little pleasures
in plastic wrapping.

And still,
somewhere,
the table remains political.
Rice on the hands.
Children underfoot.
Family as a rebellion
that smells like onions.

--

The Same Bright Cage

The new device arrives
wearing the old device's face.

A little faster.
A little brighter.
A little more expensive
for the same absence.

The man opens the box
and waits for joy.
Joy does not come.

Only the clean smell
of engineered desire.
Only the ceremony
of replacing a thing
that still worked yesterday.

Inside the bright cage:
war, jokes, maps, lies,
mothers, markets, songs,
friends, hunger,
the whole world made scrollable
and somehow smaller.

He puts it down.
His hand feels poor
without its chain.

--

To Sit With Strangers

In some places,
people still interrupt the street
with humanity.

A stranger asks where you are from
and actually waits.
A shopkeeper explains the city
as if the city were his cousin.
Someone invites you to dinner
before learning your politics.

In the colder world,
loneliness wears headphones.
Neighbors disappear politely.
The calendar must approve intimacy
three weeks in advance.

But in the pressured places,
where comfort is not guaranteed,
people still build a country
by speaking to one another.

Maybe community isn't comfort.
Maybe community is what people build
when comfort has been denied.

--

The Quiet Room for Old Paper

In the rare room,
they take away your bag.
They take away your pen.
They tell your hands
how close they may come
to the fragile surviving thing.

Only pencil.
Only breath.
Only old paper resting
like an elder with thin skin.

The book starts with a blessing.
Not decoration.
A door.

Then history enters:
ships, letters, migrants,
children born under foreign sun,
names preserved
because someone once wrote carefully.

I love the discipline of the room.
Some things survive
because tenderness
learned to wear rules.

The book can't leave.
The book can't be handled
like content.

Slow hands.
Quiet room.
Pencil only.

The Name Before Poison

Before modern maps
became arrogant,
the land had older names.

Names carried by mountains,
horse paths,
river mouths,
languages crossing each other
without permission slips.

Then men with theories came.
They measured skulls.
They ranked blood.
They took an old word
for kinship, region, memory,
and sharpened it
into a weapon.

This is what happens
when power studies a people
without loving them.

It steals the word.
It poisons the root.

It hands the sound
to murderers.

But words remember
where they first drank water.
Some must be washed
before we hold them again.

--

The Moon Is Not Owned

One country sends fire
at its neighbors.
Another asks
how to touch the moon.

The difference isn't faith.
don't let fools tell you that.
The difference is imagination.

One man opens a holy book
and looks for permission
to punish.
Another opens a holy book
and looks for a bridge.

I have no patience
for men who dress fear
in scripture.
If your God makes you cruel,
you have not met God.
If your prayer needs a victim,

you have mistaken blood
for devotion.

Let the scientist return.
And let the girl study the stars.
Let the surgeon heal.
Let the woman walk freely.

--

The Woman Buying Bread

Do not tell me a nation is free
while its women calculate the street.

How much hair.
How much color.
How late.
Which road.
Which van.
Which officer.
Which silence.

Do not tell me God wants this.
God made the wind,
and men became jealous
when it touched a woman's hair.
God made the voice,
and men called it dangerous
when it left a woman's throat.
God made the mind,

and men built rooms
too small for it.

The measure of a country
isn't its missiles.
It is whether a girl
can buy bread
without rehearsing fear.

--

The Narrow Water

At the narrow water,
the world becomes honest.

Ships line up
with oil in their bellies.
Markets sweat.
Leaders pretend
not to fear geography.

The map suddenly matters.
A strip of sea becomes a throat
through which the century breathes.

Gold, currency, sanctions,
all the clever languages of power
come down to this:
Can the ship pass?

The fisherman knows
what the economist forgets.

Water does not respect arrogance.
It carries trade,
bodies,
rumor,
warships,
and drowned children
with the same dark patience.

At the narrow water,
the world asks:
Who controls passage?

The sea says nothing.
It has seen owners before.

--

Mercy Words for War

Beware the beautiful name
on the ugly thing.

Protective action.
Stability mission.
Security corridor.
Necessary pressure.
Peace operation.

These words are washed so clean
they no longer smell
of the people beneath them.

A bomb doesn't become kind
because the pilot says sorry.
A convoy does not become guilty
because the camera arrives late.
A country does not become free
because strangers broke its state
and left the pieces
to men with guns.

There is a crime
worse than destruction:
destruction narrated as care.

--

When the Dam Answers

When the dam breaks,
water remembers
every warning ignored.

It doesn't ask
who voted.
It does not ask
which flag was official
when the maintenance stopped.
It comes like history downhill.

Houses become paper.
Roads become rivers.
Names become numbers
before morning.

Far away,
analysts discuss governance
as if grief were an index.

I see the mother
searching mud with bare hands.

Infrastructure is love
made visible.
A bridge is love.
A clinic is love.
A road repaired is love.
A dam maintained is love.

Ordinary things neglected
will one day kill
ordinary people.

--

Dice and Tea

They teach you the game
like they are teaching weather.

Dice in the hand.
Wooden board.
Tea cooling.
An uncle explaining fate
as if fate were a relative
who could be persuaded.

The pieces move
with a soft clack
older than the argument outside.

War may be near.
The headlines may be sharpening
their teeth.
But here,
a stranger becomes a friend
over the board.

Luck and strategy
sit on the same carpet.

I roll the dice.
For one second,
nothing explodes.

--

The Rope Above the Square

A man walks a rope
above the square.

Everyone looks up.
No one asks
what kind of life
requires a body
to risk death
for attention.

Then he falls.
The crowd gasps
as if the fall
were not part of the bargain.

Someone kneels.
Someone holds him.
Someone learns
that the lesson was never
in the spectacle,
but in the breathing body
on the ground.

To become more than you were
is not a slogan.
It is the rope.
It is the empty air
beneath the foot.
It is crossing
while everyone else
came only to watch.

--

Teeth for the Lie

There is a black snake
in the mouth of the century.

It says:
You are trapped.
The game is too old.

Your people are doomed.
Your grief is content.
Your attention belongs to us.
Your family is backward.
Your loneliness is freedom.

I hear the old instruction:
Bite.

Not because violence saves.
Because refusal sometimes
requires teeth.

Bite the lie.
Bite the shame.
Bite the script.
Bite the false choice
between obedience and chaos.

The mouth opens.
The shepherd laughs.
The voice returns
with dust on it,
but free.

--

Thank You for the Door

At night,
when the world is too large
and the mind begins

its old work of punishment,
I pray smaller.
Not bargain.
Not demand.
Not command.
Only this:
Thank You
for the door I could not see.
Thank You
for the answer
before I had strength
to call it answer.
Thank You
for the bread not yet baked.
Thank You
for the friend not yet met.
Thank You
for the part of me
that has not surrendered
though I have given it reasons.
Sleep comes.
Not as cure.
As mercy.

--

A Republic of Chairs

I dream of a country
with enough chairs.
One for the woman
who has stood too long.
One for the worker
whose back became a border.
One for the migrant
holding documents
like a wound.
One for the old victim.
One for the old defender.
One for the child
who asks why both are crying.
One for the believer.
One for the one
who stopped believing
after the first bomb.
One for the person
whose story accuses mine.
A country isn't mature
because it has chosen
one story.
A country is mature
when truth can arrive
in pieces
and still be offered bread.

--

More Moves Left

Verse 1
I lost a road, I lost a name,
I lost a room that knew my frame.
I lost a hand I thought would stay,
I watched the good years walk away.

Pre-Chorus
But I am not the broken square.
I am the breath still moving there.
I am not the piece that fell.
I am the player after hell.

Chorus
There are more moves left,
more dawns, more breath,
more roads through fire,
more songs from death.
If the heart still stands
in the ruins of my chest,
then the game is not done.
There are more moves left.

Verse 2
They put their board across our backs,
called hunger law and theft a tax.
But one by one, we learned the truth:
a bent back still remembers youth.

Bridge
Rise slow, rise clean,
rise from what the night has seen.
Not for revenge,
not for a crown,
rise so the board comes falling down.

--

The People Continue

The men who renamed theft
as policy
are gone or going.

The kings who believed
their portraits were permanent
are dust with better frames.

The empires that came
with maps and appetite
have become exam questions.

But the people continue.

Making tea.
Arguing politics.
Falling in love badly.
Overfeeding guests.
Teaching children old words.
Laughing in traffic.
Lighting candles.
Repairing doors.
Saving photographs.
Building lives
in the gap
between pressure and song.

Not pure.
Not perfect.
Not simple.
Not always right.

But here.

And sometimes here
is the greatest argument
against power.
Because power loves endings.
People continue.

--

The Reader Begins

I don't want followers.
I've seen what followers do
when they grow tired of thinking.

They trade one throne for another.
They remove one portrait
and hang a new face
in the same place.
They call this revolution
because the paint is fresh.

No.

The next chapter
can't be written
by the loudest man.
It can't be written
by the exile
who loves the homeland
only as inheritance.
It cannot be written

by the empire
that calls every intervention
rescue.
It cannot be written
by the market
that sells loneliness
and calls it freedom.

The next chapter must be written
by the reader.
By the woman walking without fear.
By the worker standing upright.
By the child reading under light
that doesn't bankrupt the family.
By the stranger
who invites another stranger
to dinner
and saves the world
for one evening.

Outside,
dawn has no ideology.
It simply comes
over everyone
who survived the night.

A Breath for Tomorrow

Interlude

Dawn

She lit a match with her breath,
covered the stove with prayer,
salted the lentils with remembrance.

The baby wouldn't stop coughing.

She wrapped him in yesterday's news
and whispered, "Subhanallah, even this is love."

In the courtyard,
two shoes sat facing each other,
as if waiting for their owner to come back from the night.

He did not.

—

Midday

My sister held a spoon like it was a weapon,
pretending to feed our brother invisible food.

"This is rice," she said.
"This is meat. This is praise be to God."

The sky cracked again. We stayed quiet; my father rolled a cigarette from torn pages of Qur'an.
He said, "God will forgive me."

Then he passed it to the silence.

–

Afternoon

A boy traced the names of his dead in chalk.
Then the dust came.

By sunset,
there were only fingerprints.

A woman stitched old shirts into flags
but didn't know what to write on them.

She asked, "Do you spell martyr with one tear or two?"

–

Sunset

A son came home with blood in his pockets; his mother
washed it in the last of the clean water.

"It smells like your grandfather," she said.
"When he was dying, he smelled like rust too."

The prayer call echoed against collapsed walls.
So they recited it back with cracked voices,
Like glass remembering how to be sand.

—

Night

They shared one blanket.
Not because they were cold,
but because it was the only way to stay
in the same dream.

The daughter dreamt of a goat
that could jump over tanks.

The father dreamt of a country
where his children didn't flinch at footsteps.

Both woke up crying.

—

God's Prayer

God wept that day.

Not from regret,
Not from rage,
But because even omniscience can't hold
this much mourning without breaking.

He cupped every name in His palms.
Let them bloom like calligraphy
under His breath.

He whispered: I see you.
I see you.
I see you.

And the wind answered back:
Ameen.
Ameen.
Ameen.

MOVEMENT II

NAMES AGAINST NUMBERS

Refugee Camp Lullabies

A is for Asylum
(A mother's hush beneath plastic tarp)
Hush, child, hush...
the wolves here wear badges,
and the moon takes notes through drones.

You mustn’t cry too loud tonight...
the wind carries secrets to men
who trade bullets for bread.

Your father built kingdoms
with calloused palms and a broken shovel.
Now he sleeps behind a border,
where names are numbered
and dreams are zip-tied.

Sleep, my bird-boned one,
I stitched your cradle from forgotten flags.
The stars aren't ours here...
they report to higher heavens.

But still...
I sing.

Not for peace.
For memory.

--

B is for Borderless
(A tale told by a fence post at dusk)

Once I was a line on a map,
dignified, inked, righteous.
Now I am rust.

Children use me to hang their socks.
Lovers meet in my shade.
Snipers do, too.

I used to separate "them" from "us,"
but then the dust came,
and hunger made cousins of all.

I watched a grandmother
kneel to bury bread
so her grandson might believe
there is still something sacred.

One day,
when the sun has forgiven us,
they will turn me into sculpture...
a monument to the myth
that borders ever meant anything.

--

C is for Carton Shelter
(The rain has a memory)

Cardboard dreams fold easy.
We slept in a milk crate chapel
where the tin roof hymned thunder.

My brother was born during a flood,
his first breath a gulp of war-washed sky.
Mama said it was baptism.
I said it was eviction.

We don't own time here...
only tarps and waiting lists.

But if you stack the cartons right,
you can almost believe
walls are promises.

--

D is for Drought Wedding
(The day she married a bottle cap)

They dressed her in a rice sack veil,
threaded with copper wire and candle soot.
She married water
in a land that drinks dust.

Her bouquet was dried mint
stolen from a soldier's boot.
The priest was a boy
who'd forgotten his own language.

She kissed a bottle cap,
because the real thing was rationed.
And when she danced,
it rained.

--

E is for Exodus Hymn
(Sung by the soles of barefoot men)

Step
step
silence.

The road was a throat
choked with footprints.

We named our children after directions...
North, East, Tomorrow.

We buried the maps
in a field of plastic dolls,

because even geography
gets genocided.

But onward we walk,
chanting the ancient verse:
"We were not born to die in tents."

--

F is for Fence Prayer
(Barbed wire psalms at twilight)

Oh iron spine,
thou keeper of exiles,
forgive our trespass
of existing where no flags want us.

We cut our hands
trying to climb hope.

And still we pray:
let the wind carry our scent
to the side where bread
isn't political.

--

G is for Guilt Soup
(Served at the UN tent)

Today we had lentils with a dash of shame.
Aid came with cameras...
smiling men who needed footage.

They told us to look grateful,
so we chewed slowly,

pretending not to remember
what food once meant.

Guilt is a spice
we taste without asking.

--

H is for Hijacked Sky
(A lullaby beneath a drone)

Sleep, darling.
The stars are being watched tonight.
No, not by angels.
By men who name bombs
after flowers and saints.

If the wind whistles low,
it is not a lullaby.
It is warning.

Tonight, we will dream
without soundtracks.

--

I is for Inkless Passport
(Written in stolen breath)

I wrote my name on a leaf,
tucked it in a crack in the camp wall.
If I die, let the tree remember me.

They said I don't exist...
but I remember every streetlight
from the home we left.

Every floor tile.
Every song Baba sang.
I may not have papers,
but I have memory.
And memory travels.

--

J is for Jasmine Smuggler
(An old woman's rebellion)
She crossed five checkpoints
with a pocketful of petals.
Said it was for her dead sister.
Said, "Even in hell,
the nose remembers joy."
They let her through.
And for one hour,
the camp smelled like freedom.

--

K is for Kite Bones
(Flying above barbed wire)
The children built kites
from old election posters.
They flew over the fence...
messages in color.
The guards shot three down.
The fourth returned
with a feather tied to its tail.
No one knew what it meant,

but we sewed it
into our shirts anyway.

--

L is for Lantern Widow
(She keeps the light)

Her husband burned building books
when the camp froze over.

Now she sits with a lantern,
reading silence to the orphans.

She doesn't speak.
But the way her light doesn't flicker...
it tells us all we need to know.

--

M is for Memory Rag
(What we keep)

A girl tied a piece of her mother's scarf
to a tree near the latrines.

Each week, she added more...
a shoelace, a candy wrapper,
a torn prayer bead.

They called her mad.
But when the storm came,
it was the only thing left standing.

--

N is for Names Not Taken
(For the stillborn and undocumented)

We carve names into bottle caps,
sing them in secret
before the officials erase us.

One boy...never born...
has ten mothers
and a flag made of lullabies.

O is for Oil Lamp Dreams
(Flickers in tents)

By the time night comes,
our bodies hum with heat
and absence.

We light oil lamps
and tell stories backwards...
where the ending is peace
and the beginning
was only a misunderstanding.

--

P is for Paper Boats
(Drifting in floodwater)

Children float messages
on paper boats
made from ration cards.

Some read, "I am still here."
Some read, "Forgive us."

One read, "Don't forget the moon."
It never came back.

--

Q is for Quiet Quake
(When silence screams)

There are days when no bombs fall,
no soldiers shout.
Only birds and breathing.

Those are the worst days.

Because in the silence,
grief walks freely...
reminding us
what we've buried
just to stay upright.

R is for Refugee Choir
(Sung in thirty dialects)

They said we had no country.
So we sang our own anthem.

It had no flag.
But it had harmony.

And when it rained,
even the mud hummed with us.

--

S is for Salt Bread
(Breakfast in the camp)

We eat salt bread and stare at each other
like mirrors with cracked frames.

Still, we share.
Still, we laugh
like it's an act of war.

--

T is for Thirst Gospel
(Sermon of the empty barrel)

There are no prophets here.
Only mothers
who turn empty buckets
into psalms.

They whisper to the sand:
"Rain, come home.
We miss your voice."

--

U is for Unnamed Border
(Where time loses shape)

We crossed a line
they said didn't exist...
only to be told we broke the law.

Now we wait in the nowhere.
Where maps go to die.

--

V is for Veil of Dust
(A bride's inheritance)

She wore a white sheet
dyed gray by ash and wind.

Still, she danced.
Because in war,
even love has claws.

--

W is for Waterline Tattoo
(Etched in a child's skin)

A boy marked each flood
on his arm with charcoal.
His body a tide calendar.

When the river stopped rising,
he asked if that meant
we could go home.

We didn't answer.

--

X is for X-Ray of the Soul
(Checkpoint confessional)

They scanned my bag,
my shoes, my lungs.
But missed the scream
buried beneath my collarbone.

I carry no weapon
except memory.
They didn't see it.

But it waits.

--

Y is for Yellow Thread
(Sewn through hope)

Mama stitched yellow thread
into every blanket.
Said it was the color of return.

Now the blankets are torn.
But the thread stays.

Even fire doesn't know
how to burn hope.

--

Z is for Zero Hour
(When dawn forgets you)

And when the clock stopped ticking,
we realized...
we were the timekeepers.

We the breathless.
We the nameless.
We the ones still singing
even when the world pretends
we were never here.

Hollow Cost

Reflection

This is documentation.

This is a holy record of the unseen wars:
The war against memory.
The war against humanity.
The war against language.

I don't sing for peace.
I sing because silence is too easily sold.
I write in blood and ash.
I know the names they won't print.
I sing for them.

--

Red Sky Over Gaza

I saw a boy throw stones at the sky
And the sky didn't flinch.
I saw a mother tie prayers to barbed wire,
But the wind ripped them down.
Still she prayed.
They say silence is peace.
But here, silence is filled with screaming.
Smoke wears a child's face at dawn.
No one writes their names down.

The sky is red.
The earth remembers.

—

Collateral Hallelujah

The angels wear iron now.
They fly over the fields
Where boys once ran barefoot.
Over the tents, the kitchens, the songs.
And the metal rains down.
And the songs stop.
And the angels don't look back.
They said it would keep us safe.
But I don't feel safe.
I feel hollow.
I feel forgotten.
Oh Lord
You baptized the bullets,
But no one came back clean.

—

My Brother, The Enemy

They gave me a weapon.
Said, "Point it at him."
But he looked like me.
Brown eyes, shaking hands,
Same cracked sandals.
Same sunburnt silence.
I looked down the barrel
And saw myself.

War isn't death.
War is forgetting we are mirrors.

—

Disinformation Blues

They said he was dangerous.
But I knew his name.
They said she was a traitor.
But I'd seen her weep over her father's grave.
They lied in the open,
And no one stood up.
We bit our tongues,
Chewed on fear.
Truth drowned in the village well.
And we kept drinking.

—

The Refugee Psalm

They called me a wanderer.
They called me a burden.
But I am just a man with hands.
A woman with breath.
A child with songs no one will sing.
I was born where the water dried.
I was raised where the road ended.
Now I walk,
Not to find a place,

But to find someone
Who will call me human.

—

Bullet Vows

We married in the shadow of gunfire.
She wore a dress sewn from hunger.
I wore a grin too tired to stay.
We kissed as the sirens wailed.
She said,
"If we die, let it be together."
I said,
"If we live, let them hear our names."
Our love was a flag in the storm.
Every kiss—
A bullet we refused to fire.

—

The One Who Learned To Forget

He watched them drag the bodies.
He saw the fires light the hills.
He heard the crying.
Then he chose not to remember.
It was easier that way.
He drank forgetfulness like water.
He buried his memory with the bones.
But forgetting is a violence.
And silence is complicity.

—

She Sang from a Country That No Longer Exists

She lit candles with no wax.
She braided hope into her hair.
Her house was rubble.
Her brothers—names on a wall.
But she still sang.
Even when no one listened.
Even when the melody was all she had.

To sing is to resist.
To breathe is to rebuild.

—

Operation: Sanitized

They didn't call it war.
They called it "necessary."
They didn't say "children."
They said "targets."
They didn't say "massacre."
They said "response."

But the mothers knew.
The soil knew.
And the bones underfoot will one day speak.

—

Bloodlines in the Sand

My grandfather crossed that hill.
Now it belongs to someone else.
My cousin died at that border.

Now the line is drawn further.
They said we didn't belong.
But we have always been here.
The trees know our names.
The stones still whisper our prayers.
You can bury blood.
But you can't erase it.

—

Lullaby for the Forgotten

Sleep now, little one.
The wind can't hurt you here.
Your name was never written,
But I carry it in my chest.
They left you without a grave.
But the stars know where you rest.
Hush now.
You were loved.
Even in silence.

—

The Last Chant of the Human Soul

They took the river.
We drank from the dust.
They took the language.
We spoke with our eyes.
They took the drum.
We beat on our chests.

They took the light.
We sang in the dark.
And in the end—
They came for the soul.
But the soul,
The soul is wild.
The soul is flame.
And no matter how deep they dig,
It burns.
We are the chant.
We are the storm.
We are the human soul,
Unyielding.

—

Stones That Remember Fire

The Street Keeps Count

The street keeps count
even when the papers lie.
Even when the cameras turn away
and the men in suits say
this is balance,
this is strategy,
this is history behaving as designed.

The wall knows every name.
The dust knows every child.
A mother folds a shirt in half
as if the body might still be inside.

And the siren is not a theory.
And the checkpoint is not a speech.
And the blood on the curb
doesn't wait for permission
to become memory.

So beat the drum,
not for war
but for the truth that war leaves behind:
a shoe in the road,
a prayer cut short,
and a people learning again
how grief turns into language.

--

Before the Second Hand Falls

there's always a second
before the blast,
before the order,
before the border closes like a fist.

A second
when the baker still reaches for flour,
when the school bell almost rings,
when the boy with the football
believes in the ordinary republic of afternoon.

Then the second breaks.

And history enters in boots.
And men become maps.
And maps become knives.
And every leader says
he had no choice
while children inherit
the choices of men.

Who steals the second
steals the century.
Who steals the breadline dawn
steals more than bread.

--

Love, Or Something Brave Enough

Do not send me slogans
stitched in gold.
Do not send me podium peace
with soldiers just offstage.

Bring me the peace
that survives an insult.
Bring me the peace
that will not humiliate.
Bring me the peace
that comes back water to a village
before it returns pride to a parliament.

Love, or something brave enough
to kneel in the rubble
and say:
your child isn't my enemy.
Your wound is not my victory.
Your God is not a target for my fear.

Let the men who profit from fire
be left alone with their matches.
We are busy trying
to keep one another alive.

--

The City Burning in the Mind

There are fires
that burn buildings.

There are fires
that burn a century into the skin.

A city is lit
not only by flame
but by the names of the lost
moving through it like weather.

Aleppo. Gaza. Beirut. Baghdad.
Jerusalem in the throat.
Damascus in the ribs.
Sana'a under the eyelid.
Mosul in the dream that will not end.

The unforgiving fire
is not the blaze,
it is what stays after:
the doorway with no house,
the handwriting under ash,
the tea glass still standing
on a table that has no room around it.

And still, in the dark,
someone strikes a match
not to destroy
but to find the photograph
of who they were.

--

At the Edge of Betrayal

I kissed you with treaties.
I betrayed you with signatures.
I spoke of tomorrow
while selling your morning away.

This is how empires sin now:
not only with guns
but with language,
with carefully tailored mercy,
with the polished cruelty
of diplomatic delay.

And the people?
They wait beneath the chandeliers of power
without ever entering the room.
Their dead are discussed
between coffee courses.
Their future is bartered
like a favor owed among cousins.

At the edge of betrayal
every prophet sounds exhausted.
Every child sounds ancient.
And still the crowd asks:
how many times can a promise die
before it becomes policy?

--

Dream for the Children Under Concrete

Sleep now,
little one of smoke and stars.
Sleep through the trembling glass.
Sleep through the men who mistake thunder
for authority.

May the angels remember your street
when the state forgets.
May the olive tree keep watch.
May the moon lean low enough
to hear your breathing.

Sleep now,
child of interrupted songs.
May tomorrow arrive
with less iron in it.
May your books come back unburned.
May your mother laugh from the kitchen again.
May the sky learn
it was made for birds.

And if the night grows hard,
let every saint, every ancestor, every hidden mercy
stand at your door
until morning.

--

Please, Before Another Year Is Buried

Please.
Before another boy becomes a poster.

Before another girl is translated
into casualty numbers.
Before another grave
is called regrettable but necessary.

Please.
Before faith is conscripted
into somebody's campaign.
Before revenge puts on a uniform
and calls itself justice.

Please listen
to the people whose names
never make the summit agenda.
The farmers, the nurses, the drivers, the widows,
the teachers writing alphabets
under drones.

They are not asking for eternity.
They are asking for Tuesday.
For medicine.
For wages.
For sleep.
For one generation
that does not have to memorize explosions
by sound alone.

--

September Prayer

The fig tree stands
like an old witness.
Its leaves know more than ministers do.

September comes with thin light,
and all the saints of the broken region
walk barefoot through the dust of our headlines.

I've seen boys pray
with one eye on the sky.
I have seen girls braid each other's hair
beside buildings split open like scripture.

The mosque calls.
The church bell answers.
A mother in black whispers a psalm.
A father on a bus mouths verses from the Qur'an.
A child draws a house
large enough for everyone.

O September, be gentle.
These people have been carrying kingdoms
inside ordinary bodies
for too long.

--

Two Banks, One River

West of the river
a boy learns one history.
East of the river
a girl learns another.

At the crossing
both are searched.
Both are told to wait.
Both are taught
that fear is realism
and memory must choose a side.

But the river doesn't divide itself.
It keeps carrying moonlight
to whoever stands near enough to see.

And grief is bilingual.
And exile has many flags.
And the same wind
moves through the same cypress trees
whether the dead were called martyrs,
soldiers, civilians, rebels, innocents.

Who profits from a people split in two?
Who grows rich from inherited suspicion?
Two banks, one river.
Two prayers, one sky.
Many graves, one earth.

Summer Under the Drones

It is summer
but the heat isn't the worst of it.

The children still chase footballs
between interrupted walls.

Still buy ice cream
when the freezer works.
Still flirt, still laugh, still dare the evening
to remember its old job.

Then the buzzing starts—
that metallic insect of modern empire,
that sermon from above
about precision.

Summer under the drones
is a season of unfinished gestures:
a hand halfway to the window,
a wedding song cut at the chorus,
a market bargain suspended in the mouth.

And yet the young still love.
This may be the final rebellion:
to wear white shoes in a war zone,
to send a reckless text,
to kiss beneath a balcony
while history circles overhead
looking for coordinates.

--

Peace Is Not the Silence After

Peace isn't the silence after impact.
Peace is not the pause
while the next convoy is arranged.
Peace is not a photograph

of men shaking hands
above a table no mother sat at.

Peace is bread that crosses borders.
Water that isn't weaponized.
A road open after dark.
A courthouse that doesn't ask
which dead belong to which grief.

Peace is the right
to bury your father
without permission from a rifle.
Peace is a school with windows.
A field without mines.
A child whose drawing of the sun
is not mistaken for politics.

Call it peace
only when the people do.

--

Mothers Who Wait at the Threshold

At dusk they stand in doorways
with photographs in plastic sleeves.
Not because they have given up
but because hope has become ritual.

One disappeared in Lebanon.
One in Syria.
One in Iraq.
One in prison.

One at sea.
One beneath a name no authority will release.

The mothers know
what the state does with silence:
it buries twice.

So they lift their sons and daughters
high in the air of public squares.
They hold them over history's head
and say:
You will not erase them.
You will not file them into dust.
You will not make a bureaucracy
out of my child.

Their mourning is a nation
larger than any map.

--

Flag in the Windstorm

On yet another red warning day
everyone is told to choose:
tribe or truth,
revenge or surrender,
our dead or theirs.

But the windstorm is lying.
It wants the blood hot.
It wants the old songs sharpened
into marching orders.

Listen instead
to the man rebuilding a bakery.
To the girl carrying books through rubble.
To the doctor washing sleep from his eyes
for the third shift in a row.
To the grandmother planting mint
beside a cracked wall.

These are the colors I trust:
bread-brown, dust-white, olive-green,
the blue of a basin full of clean water.

Raise that flag.
Raise the flag of the living.
Let it whip in the face of every power
that feeds on funerals.

--

Moment at the Checkpoint

I saw a soldier younger than sorrow
holding a rifle older than wisdom.
I saw a man in work boots
emptying his pockets
as if dignity too
must pass inspection.

At the checkpoint
time does not move forward.
It kneels.

It waits.
It learns obedience in small humiliations.
A woman with groceries.
A student with an exam.
An old man with medicine.
A child asking why.
This is how a people are worn down:
not only by bombs
but by repetition,
by the drip-drip liturgy of delay,
by the lesson that your body
is always someone else's paperwork.
And then, one day,
someone lets another pass.
And for one strange second
the whole world seems possible again.

--

Names for Dawn

How long?
Until the checkpoints rust?
Until the camps become neighborhoods?
Until the speeches end
and the people begin?
How long
will the desert drink our young?
How long

will the sea keep swallowing the desperate?
How long
will every peace be postponed
until after one more war?

I will sing
while the night insists on itself.
I will sing
for the missing, for the buried, for the unborn,
for the stone thrower, the schoolteacher,
the widow at the water line,
the father counting loaves.

And I will sing this back to the hills:
There is a dawn with our names on it.
There is a dawn no empire can veto.
There is a dawn for every tongue and tribe
that has buried too much.

How long?
Long enough to learn
that survival is holy.
Long enough to answer one another:
not forever.
Not forever.

A View to Your World

Interlude

THE WINDOWS NEVER OPENED

I remember a boy
running shirtless through sun-shot smoke,
feet calloused from chasing stray dogs and barefoot futures.
He used to scream into fences
just to hear his echo
pretend he had a god listening.

That boy is ash now.
And we walk on him—
in boardrooms, in war rooms, in hospitals with broken soap dispensers.
They built a country over his silence
then sold the flag that muffled him.

If I could go back,
I'd tell him to keep screaming.
Because the windows never opened.

—

A SONG YOU HUM THROUGH TEETH

They won't put this song on the radio.
Too slow. Too real. Too much bleeding in the chorus.

It's the song your grandmother hummed
when they came for her husband.
It's the note your brother's boots tapped
as he knelt, head down, at the edge of a ditch.

It's that rhythm between heartbeats—
when you know the news is bad,
but the phone hasn't rung yet.

Don't sing it out loud.
Just hum it. Through clenched teeth.
Where they can't touch it.

—

THIS IS NOT A WAR

No one declared it.
There were no medals. No flags. No names etched into granite.

But we buried something.
And we keep burying.

Mothers carry plastic bags filled with insulin and love letters.
Fathers tape cardboard to their feet and whisper,
"I'm still a man."
Children name the cracks in the ceiling
like saints.

Don't tell me this isn't a war.
We just stopped counting the bodies.

—

THE ONES WHO STAYED

Everyone talks about the ones who left.
The brave, the bold, the broken.
But no one talks about the ones who stayed.

The woman who turns the sign to OPEN at the corner store
even after they smashed her windows.
The man who still wears his wedding ring
thirty-three years after the accident.
The boy who walks his little sister to school
past the same patch of blood on the sidewalk—
pretending not to see it.

The ones who stayed
built the bones of this country.
And they still don't have keys to the front door.

—

WE WERE NEVER LIONS

They told us we were lions—
That we could tear through history,
roar against the sky,
drink from silver streams,
never beg.

But we were never lions.
We were boys who skipped breakfast,
girls who learned to laugh quieter,

hands that shook in checkout lines,
throats that locked mid-prayer.
We bit the bars of the cages
until our teeth turned into sermons.
And they called us beasts.
Because we remembered we were still alive.

—

MOVEMENT III

THE BODY UNDER EMPIRE

The Body Refuses the Anesthetic

I. The Call Into the Wall

Can you hear me
through the plaster of the century?

Not the clean wall.
Not the museum wall.
The wall with wires in it.
The wall with names scratched low
where children could reach.
The wall that learned
how to separate a mother
from the room where her son
was still breathing.

I knock once.

No answer.

I knock again.

Somewhere inside,
a man turns up the television
because the scream outside
has begun to resemble his own.

This is how the shutdown begins:
not as cruelty,
but as self-defense
that forgot to stop defending.

The body says,
I can't hold another dead child.

The soul says,
Then hold one.

Only one.

Hold the one whose shoe
was smaller than your palm.
Hold the one whose name
did not survive the caption.
Hold the one whose mother
kept calling into broken air
as if love itself
could become a rescue crew.

don't ask yet
where it hurts.

The whole century
is pointing.

—

II. Clinical Notes from the Empire Ward

The doctor enters
wearing a badge of polished language.

He doesn't say famine; he says pressure.

He doesn't say massacre; he says event.

He doesn't say occupation.
He says security arrangement.

He doesn't say child; he says minor.

He doesn't say mother.
He says civilian female.

He asks for the basic facts.
The facts arrive limping.

One school.
Two roads.
Three hospitals.
Four generations.
Five prayers interrupted.
Six trucks delayed.
Seven men explaining
why mercy must wait
until the paperwork matures.

The doctor writes:
Patient uncooperative.

But the patient is not one body.

The patient is the city.
The patient is the camp.
The patient is the old woman
who still keeps a key
to a door that became policy.

The patient is the world
lying very still
while men in clean rooms
argue over dosage.

How much pain
can a people be given
before the witness becomes addicted
to not feeling it?

—

III. The Second Voice

Do not speak to me
as if I am a symbol.

I have had enough
of being useful
to other people's metaphors.

I was not born
to become your lesson
about resilience.

I was not born
to make your prayer
more dramatic.

I was not born
so your country could discover
the word tragedy
and still sell the weapon.

I had a kitchen once; there was a blue cup.
There was a crack in the ceiling
that looked like a river
if you stared long enough.

My brother said
the river was going home.

My mother said
don't make stories
out of broken things.

Then the roof opened
like a mouth.

Now everyone wants a statement.

Here is my statement:

I am tired
of becoming visible
only after the strike.

I am tired
of being counted
by people who can't pronounce me.

I am tired
of cameras arriving
with one eye open
and both hands empty.

don't ask me
to become calm
for your comfort.

I am the voice
you tried to bury
under explanation.

I am still speaking.

—

IV. The Medicine

They offer the medicine gently.

A little spectacle.
A little scrolling; A little expert panel.
A little sad music
under footage from far away.

A little both-sides.
A little history is complicated.
A little nobody really knows; A little take care of your mental health.
A little switch the channel; A little order food.
A little sleep.

The medicine works.

Soon the body stops shaking.
Soon the eye stops widening.
Soon the heart learns
how to step around the wound
without touching it.

The second dose is distance.

The third dose is the sentence:
What can I do anyway?

After that,
the silence turns into almost peaceful.

You can eat beside it.
You can laugh beside it.
You can plan a vacation
while a hospital goes dark
inside your pocket.

But the soul keeps refusing
to swallow.

It hides the pill
under its tongue.

At night,
when the house is quiet,
it spits the medicine out
and whispers:

No.

Not this time.
–

V. The Screen Becomes a Hospital

Every device glows
like a small emergency room.

Inside it,
the wounded wait
for attention to become action.

A father carries his child
across the feed.

A mother washes a face
that will not wake.

A journalist speaks
with the calm of someone
who has already buried
too many versions of himself.

The comments arrive.

Fake.
Context.
Tragic.
Necessary.
Complicated.
Praying.

Following.
Unfollowing.

The screen doesn't mourn.
It only refreshes.

But somewhere
a girl watches
and doesn't scroll.

She writes the name down.
Then another.
Then another.

By morning,
her notebook is no longer a notebook.

It is a small cemetery
with pages.

It is a courtroom
that has not yet opened.

It is a country
of rescued names.

This is how feeling comes back:
not all at once,

not as thunder,
but as a hand
refusing to move
past the face.

—

VI. Refusal Hymn

I won't turn away
in the room where children are named.

I won't go blank
while bread is stopped at the gate.

I won't become a quiet instrument
while men turn grief
into a debate format.

I will not close the nerve
because the wound is far away.

I won't close the nerve
because the wound is near.

I won't excuse myself
because the story is old.

I won't excuse myself
because the weapon is new.

I won't reduce the dead
to the mercy of numbers.

I will begin with one.

One name.
One mother.
One road.
One cup.
One hand.
One unfinished song.

Let the powerful keep
their anesthesia.

Let the empire keep
its white coat.

Let the commentator keep
his careful distance.

I choose the ache
that keeps me human.

I choose the grief
that still knows how to feed.

I choose the sorrow
that doesn't become hatred.

I choose the nerve
over the needle.

I choose the open wound
over the polished lie.

I choose to feel
until feeling becomes work.

—

VII. After the Anesthetic

When the medicine leaves,
it does not leave gently.

It takes the walls with it.

Suddenly the room is full
of everyone you tried not to hear.

The child.
The mother.
The doctor.
The prisoner.
The poet.
The stranger at the border.

The old man whose house
exists now only as a smell
inside his memory.

They don't accuse you first.

That is the mercy.

They ask for water.

They ask for bread.

They ask for your voice
not as performance,
but as tool.

They ask you
to stop admiring your sadness
and make it useful.

So you rise.

Not healed.
Not pure.
Not heroic.

Just awake enough
to answer the door.

Outside,
the world is still burning.

But somewhere
beneath the noise,
a person you don't know
is still alive
because someone else
refused the drug of distance.

Let that be the chorus.

Let that be the pulse.

LET THAT BE THE FIRST NOTE
of the human being
coming back to himself.

Smoke Signals

WHAT THEY DIDN'T BROADCAST

--

Static Prayer

I put my hands together
but the signal keeps breaking.
My God lives between channels now,
humming beneath war reports and shampoo ads.
I prayed once into a Bluetooth speaker—
it answered back in feedback and sirens.

--

The Silence Is Mic'd

Everything I don't say
gets recorded anyway.
The walls wear wires.
The light bulbs blink Morse.
I tried whispering to myself,
but even my echo had paperwork.

--

Bulletproof Gospel

They gave the choir Kevlar robes
and the preacher preaches
behind a plexiglass pulpit.
He says:
Blessed are the barricaded,
for theirs is the kingdom
of nothing left to lose.

--

Notes from the Rooftop Snipers

He wrote poetry
on the back of spent shell casings.
Said:
I don't want to shoot.
I just want to remember
what birds looked like
before they became
surveillance.

--

The Algorithm Doesn't Know My Name

Every app calls me a number,
but none remember my birthday.

I uploaded my face to the cloud
and it gave me a forecast
of who I'll never be.
Somewhere, a machine knows
what I'll dream before I do.

--

Breadline Ballet

She pirouettes for flour; he does jazz hands for canned beans.
There's rhythm in hunger,
choreography in despair.
And still they smile—
'cause the news crew showed up today.

--

Your Wi-Fi Is Watching You

I tried to turn off the modem
but it wept.
Told me it missed the warmth
of my secrets.
It's lonely,
you know—

being the only thing in the house
that hears everything
and forgets nothing.

--

The Officer's Shadow

He stepped on my neck
without touching me.
His shadow wrapped my throat
before he ever asked my name.
Even in sunlight,
some uniforms
block out the soul.

--

They Shot the Shepherd First

Said he was inciting the sheep.
Told him to register the sermon.
When he refused,
they called it rebellion.
Now the lambs don't bleat.
They bark.

--

Airstrike Lullabies

The babies only sleep
when the planes pass.
Boom turns into bedtime.
Shrapnel is white noise.
We hum nursery rhymes
in minor keys,
and pray they don't remember
what peace felt like.

--

Everything Is a Prison, Even the Anthem

I stood for the anthem
until I realized
the lyrics were bars
and the melody locked me in.
Now I hum it in reverse
and they call me a traitor.

--

When the Light Poles Fell

It wasn't the quake
that took the city—
it was the silence after.

When the light poles cracked
and no one came to fix them,
we learned to glow
from within.

--

All the Schools Were Churches Once

They renamed the chalk white again.
Repainted truth with nationalism.
Pledged allegiance to ignorance.
Our children learn history
from the footnotes
of propaganda.

--

Dispatches from the Wronged

--

My Brother Was an Earthquake

He shook before he fell.
Laughed loud, like tectonic plates kissing.
Then came the quiet,
the courtroom,

the certificate that said "accident"
when we all heard the boots.

--

They Buried Her in the Hashtag

She trended for three days—
longer than most flowers.
The algorithm wept
then moved on
to a cat playing piano.
Her name still stains the feed
like red on concrete.

--

The Sound of Waterboarding in D

They tuned the faucet to despair; played skin like it was sin.
Composed silence
with a rag and a lie.
I swear the torturer hummed
between screams.
Said he preferred minor keys.

--

Nine Days Before the Ceasefire

The air tasted of copper and apology.
Kids still threw stones
at tanks
and called it soccer.
Mothers rehearsed CPR
like bedtime stories.
We all knew peace was a countdown—
not a promise.

--

Only the Poor Hear the Sirens

They cut through sky like unpaid bills; the rich hear jazz.
We hear judgment.
Sirens don't visit mansions—
just tenements
and memories
with outstanding warrants.

--

Who Burned the Olive Tree?

She was 900 years old
and fed rebels, lovers, widows, ghosts.
Now she's ash
in a museum pamphlet.
The army says it was weather.
We say it was vengeance.

--

If You Can't Breathe, You Can't Vote

They made ballots airless; suffrage choked on tear gas.
Every vote cast
from beneath a boot
counts twice—
but not for the winner.

--

Poem Written on a Tear Gas Canister

It read:
I was made in freedom's shadow
but deployed in its name.
Breathed in by poets.
Exhaled as silence; manufactured in peace.
Tested on dreams.

--

The Sand Covers Everything but the Guilt

They say time erases.
But time just buries.
Children build castles
on bones.
Flags wave above graveyards
with names spelled wrong
on purpose.

--

A Factory That Makes Orphans

They make boots
and bullets
and boys without fathers.
Each shift ends with a silence
louder than paycheques.
Management says:
Business is booming.

--

The Border Is a Mouth That Never Closes

It eats names; it chews paperwork.
It swallows accents
and spits out slurs.
The lucky cross.
The unlucky decorate fences.

--

Somewhere, the Sky Is Still Blue

Not here.
Here, the sky has curfew.
But somewhere,
a child traces shapes in clouds
that aren't shaped like drones.
Somewhere,
the sun
is just the sun.

--

LOVE LETTERS FROM THE ASH ⇝

--

Make Me a God of Mud, Not Gold

I want to be worshipped with dirty hands.
Built from the same soil that fed our roots
and buried our kin.
Don't gild me—
wrap me in rain.
Kiss me with callused mouths
that still know the taste of struggle.

--

Teach Me to Dance Without Land

You took the drum
and the floor beneath it.
Now we dance midair—
in exile,
in code,
in rhythm passed from ankle to ancestor.
We remember the steps.
Even when the ground forgets us.

--

Grandma Hides the Revolution in Her Soup

She stirs it slow,
whispers names between spices.

Each carrot a protest,
each bone a story.
She serves it with bread and a warning:
"Don't speak it loud—
swallow it whole."

--

The Church of the Missing Fathers

We light candles for men
we barely remember.
Hang their hats on sacred hooks
and call it healing.
Every prayer sounds like
"Where were you?"
But softer.

--

I'm Still in Love with My Country (Even If It Hates Me)

I tattooed her map on my chest.
She branded a number on my back.
We argue through borders; we make up through sunsets.
And still,
I carry her flag

folded in my silence.

--

Kiss Me Like the Drone Is Watching

If they're gonna bomb this roof,
let it be mid-embrace.
Let my lips be the last revolution
they never predicted.
Hold me like sin,
like sirens don't matter.
If we die,
let it be honest.

--

Love in a Time of Internet Shutdowns

We passed notes
like contraband.
Met beneath blackout skies
and spelled "I miss you"
in the steam of boiled rice.
Your voice came in glitches.
Still,
it was gospel.

--

This Poem Is a Smuggled Weapon

Folded in my waistband; carved into apple cores.
Sent across borders
inside lullabies.
If they read it out loud,
someone somewhere
might start dreaming again.

--

My Lover Has Three Names (None of Them Legal)

One name for the market,
one for the mosque,
one for the mirror.
I kiss them all
like passports I'll never own.
Their voice is made of crossing guards
and undone chains.

--

They'll Call This Fiction Someday

When the dust settles,
they'll say it never happened.
Children won't learn our names,
only their mistakes.
And still,
someone will hum a song
that smells like truth
and remember.

--

My Passport Expires, But My Grief Does Not

Ink fades.
Borders change.
But the ache?
It renews itself.
Every checkpoint asks:
Where are you from?
I say:
Everywhere I cried.

--

The Archive Refuses to Forget

There's a drawer full of screams
kept in a museum basement.
Unlabeled.
Unclaimed.
Some archivist in a cardigan
dusts them daily
and whispers,
"We see you."

--

Let the Children Inherit the Street

Not the debts.
Not the fear.
But the rhythm,
the spit-slicked pavement gospel.
Let them ride joy like stolen bikes,
draw futures in chalk,
and repaint sirens into music.

--

Smoke Signals for the Century

They banned the books; erased the footage.

Muted the prayers.
But someone
in the hills,
on the rooftops,
in the dark between scrolls—
lit a fire
and let it speak.

This is that flame.

This is that breath
rising through ruin,
saying:

We were here.
We saw.
We sang anyway.

--

The Screen That Taught the War

Before the Headline Arrived

This is not a call against a people; this is not a sermon against a prayer.

This is not an invitation to inherit somebody else's hatred.
No child is born carrying a war room.

No grandmother is responsible for the minister's mouth.

No synagogue, mosque, church, temple, or unbelieving kitchen carries what power does after it steals the language of fear.

This is about the machinery.

The machinery that taught the public to fear the face before the face could speak.

The machinery that made an accent sound like evidence.

The machinery that turned a name into a file, a beard into a warning, a scarf into a headline, a prayer into a threat, a village into a target, a dead child into a debate segment.

Before the bomb, there was rehearsal; before the checkpoint, there was vocabulary.

Before the drone, there was a studio light.
Before the prison, there was a category.

Before the policy, there was a word repeated until the public no longer heard the human being inside it.

This chamber enters the wound through two doors: the screen and the bell. The screen names the machinery. The bell asks what must wake after the lesson is broken.

I write this for the child who learned to lower his voice at the airport.

For the mother who told her son not to speak Arabic too loudly on the train.

For the girl who shortened her name so the classroom would stop bleeding her every morning.

For the boy who saw someone like him on television only when a city was burning.

For the people who were made to condemn before they were allowed to mourn.

The question is simple and terrible:

what does a civilization become when it trains itself to fear another people's children?

A civilization doesn't become cruel all at once. First it rehearses a face until the face stops being a face.

I. THE FIRST BROADCAST

The Living Room Learns Fear

The living room was not ready for history.

It had a couch with one broken spring.

A bowl of fruit going soft.
A father asleep with the remote in his hand.

A mother folding school uniforms.
A child on the carpet building a city from plastic bricks.

Then the screen cleared its throat.
Breaking news.

The words came dressed in urgency.
The music sharpened itself.

The anchor lowered her voice to the register reserved for national injury; behind her, smoke became a flag.

Behind the smoke, a map appeared.
Behind the map, a region.

Behind the region, a people; behind the people, a suspicion that did not yet admit it was being born.

The child on the carpet looked up.
He did not understand policy.

He did not understand empire.
He did not understand grief being edited into a package.

He only understood that the room had changed temperature, and that the adults were now looking at the screen the way people look at a door they think something might enter through.

Later, he would hear the word again.
Again.

Again.
Terror.

Terrorist.

Terrorism.

Terror threat.

Terror network.

Terror cell.

Terror suspect.

Terror sympathizer.

The word multiplied like mold in a wet wall.

Soon it entered airports; soon it entered classrooms.

Soon it entered jokes.

Soon it entered movies.

Soon it entered the mouth of the boy who had never met anyone from the region but knew, somehow, to be afraid.

The first broadcast didn't show a villain; it built one.

Not all at once; not with a single lie.

With repetition.

With lighting.

With maps.

With certain names said differently than others.

With the camera lingering on one kind of grief and hurrying past another.

With experts who spoke as if the human heart were a border to be managed.

The father woke up and said, Turn that up.

The child obeyed.

This is how the living room learned fear.

—

Commercial Break After the Explosion

After the explosion,
a commercial for trucks.

After the crying mother,
a commercial for allergy medicine.

After the body under the sheet,
a clean kitchen,

a smiling couple,
a golden retriever

that has never had to explain its citizenship.
This is the genius of the screen:

it can place apocalypse
beside a discount code

and call the arrangement normal.
The anchor comes back.

Her face has been powdered
against the moral weather.

She says officials believe.
She says sources suggest.

She says security concerns; she says the region.

She says militants.
She says ancient tensions.

She says complicated.
Complicated is a beautiful word
when no one wants to say profitable.
The analyst nods.
The retired general nods.
The former adviser nods.
The sponsor nods invisibly.
The viewer nods because nodding feels like knowledge
when the room is too far from the smoke.
No one says:
who sold the weapon?
who trained the fear?
who benefits when the public stops seeing faces?
Nobody asks:
why does the camera know how to mourn one child
and classify another?
Then another commercial.
A vacation.
An ocean.
A family laughing beside water
no one has turned into policy.
The child on the carpet asks,
Are they bad people?
The room goes quiet.
The screen answers for them.
–

They Taught You

They taught you the desert was danger.

Not by saying it plainly; that would have been too honest.

They taught you with color grading.
With minor keys.

With dust on the lens.
With brown men running through market scenes while the hero checked his ammunition.

With a woman in a veil shown only as silence, grief, or clue; with subtitles that came late and translated every prayer as menace.

They taught you the language was harsh; they never let you hear it in a kitchen.

Never let you hear a grandmother coaxing a child to eat.
Never let you hear two lovers arguing over tea.

Never let you hear a father blessing his son's new shoes.
They taught you the region was ancient hatred.

Not recent policy; not borders drawn by hands that would never wait at them.

Not resources, corridors, contracts, bases, alliances, debt, history with a knife behind its back.

They taught you the face was already a problem.
Before the face smiled.

Before it cried.
Before it said excuse me.

Before it asked for asylum; before it entered the classroom.

Before it entered the airport line.
Before it turned into your neighbor.

They taught you to flinch; then they called your flinching common sense.

—

The First Fear Had Good Lighting

The first fear had good lighting.

It didn't come screaming; it came professionally.

It came with graphics, theme music, a serious desk, a former official, an urgent chyron, and a map glowing red in places the audience had never been asked to love.

Fear entered wearing a suit.
It had sources.

It had access; it had anonymous briefings.

It had a vocabulary clean enough to survive dinner.

The public didn't wake up one day and decide to stop seeing certain people as fully human.

The public was tutored.
Slowly.

Night after night.

Segment after segment; movie after movie.

Briefing after briefing; first, the face became foreign.

Then the foreign turned into suspect.

Then the suspect became threat; then the threat turned into target.

Then the target became regrettable.
Then regret became routine.

This is how a people are flattened; not by hatred alone.

By grammar.
By atmosphere.

By expert confidence; by the painless cruelty of distance.

The first fear had good lighting.
So good

many mistook it
for truth.

—

Anthem for the Ordinary Face

Verse 1

I saw you first through borrowed glass,
through captions made of smoke.

They told me you were thunder
before I heard you joke.

They showed me desert, siren, flame,
a running crowd at night.

They never showed your sister
teasing you about your height.

Pre-Chorus

Before the border learned your name,
before the camera chose the frame,
before the frightened room agreed,
you were a child with ordinary needs.

Chorus

O ordinary face,
come back into the light.
No headline gets to own you.
No empire gets it right.
O ordinary face,
let every false fear fall.
The world was taught to miss you,
but you were human after all.

Verse II

You had a cup, a song, a scar,
a street that knew your feet.
You had a mother calling you
before the evening heat.
They cut your life to footage,
then wondered why we stared.
They made your grief a weather map
and told us to be scared.

Bridge

Ring the bell, not for the king.
Ring it for the name.

Ring it for the child restored
from category and flame.

Final Chorus

O ordinary face,

come back into the light.
No headline gets to own you.

No empire gets it right.
O ordinary face,

let every false fear fall.
The world was taught to miss you,

but you were human after all.

II. THE WORD THAT TRAVELLED

Before the Bomb Came the Vocabulary

Before the bomb came the vocabulary.
Before the roof opened,

the roof was softened
into infrastructure.

Before the child died,
the child was placed

near a suspected site.
Before the blockade starved,

the hunger was framed
as pressure.

Before the family fled,
the road was designated
as a corridor.
Before the mourning was allowed,
the mourner was asked
to condemn correctly.
Language doesn't pull the trigger.
No.
Language washes the hand
before the hand appears on television.
Language moves the furniture
so the body can fall
without breaking the room's idea of itself.
Language teaches the public
which deaths arrive as tragedy
and which deaths arrive as context.
So I listen to the first word; the first word is the weather vane.
The first word tells me
which way permission is blowing.

—

Minutes from the Euphemism Committee

The committee met at 9:00.
Coffee was served. Nobody mentioned where it came from.
A junior officer suggested the phrase dead children. The

chair thanked him for his passion and moved the language to future review.

Civilian harm was approved. Kinetic event remained under consideration. Mistakes were made was praised for its historical durability. The word mistake won three votes because it had no visible hands.

Someone asked whether the sentence should include the name of the family. The room became serious in the way rooms become serious when a human being threatens to enter the document.

The final statement read: An incident occurred.

Outside, a man used his shirt to carry what remained of his daughter.

The committee adjourned at 9:47.

The Word Terrorist Learns to Travel

The word terrorist learned to travel
faster than any refugee.

It crossed borders without papers; it entered studios without being searched.

It sat in briefings beside men who had never met the mothers it would later accuse.

It moved through laws, airports, classrooms, dinner tables, schoolyards, comment sections, films, sermons, jokes, checkpoints, and the small rooms where children begin to

understand which parts of themselves make adults nervous.

At first, the word was a category; then it became weather.

It hovered.
Over a name.

Over an accent.
Over a prayer mat.

Over a beard.

Over a scarf.
Over a charity donation.

Over a political opinion.

Over a dead child whose death could be made less urgent if someone could place the word near enough to the body.

The word terrorist isn't always used to identify violence; sometimes it is used to prepare violence.

Sometimes it walks into the room before the army; sometimes it knocks on the door before the warrant.

Sometimes it stands beside the bomb and whispers: perhaps this was necessary.

A word can become a cage.

A cage can become a policy; A policy can become a grave.

So I don't trust words that travel too easily through powerful mouths.
I ask them for their papers.

I ask who packed them; I ask whose blood they have
learned to avoid noticing.

—

The Good Muslim Interview

Before he can mourn,
he must condemn.

Before he can name the dead,
he must pass the microphone's loyalty test.

Before he can say my cousin,
my aunt,

my people,
my neighborhood,

my son,
my God,

my grief,
he must prove his sorrow isn't dangerous.

The host smiles with polished teeth.
Do you condemn?

The question sits there
like a metal detector

at the entrance to humanity; he says yes.

Of course.

All killing of civilians.
All murder.

All children.
All of it.

Everywhere.
By everyone.

The host nods
as if granting a temporary visa.

Then he tries to speak of rubble.
The host asks for context.

He tries to speak of siege; the host asks about extremism.

He tries to speak of his mother.
The host asks about ideology.

He tries to speak of the child; the host asks whether he
can understand the fear on the other side.

He can.
That is the cruelty.

He can understand everyone's fear
and still no one has made room for his.

After the interview,
people online say he seemed angry.

What a discovery.
A man whose dead have been turned into a segment
has failed to appear grateful for airtime.

–

Passive Voice Wears Cologne

Homes were destroyed.
Bodies were found.
Aid was delayed; shots were fired.
Mistakes were made; passive voice wears cologne.
It enters the room clean; it shakes hands.
It hides the weapon under grammar.
No one destroyed.
No one found; no one delayed.
Nobody fired; no one made.
The sentence floats
without a body to answer for it.
This is how language launders blood; A child was killed.
By whom?
A neighborhood was flattened.
By whom?
A convoy was struck.
By whom?
A people were starved.
By whom?
A hospital went dark.
Who kept the fuel away?
Grammar looks at the floor.
The newsroom calls this neutrality.
The ministry calls this caution.

The ally calls this responsible language.
The mother calls it another burial.

I return to the verb.

Someone ordered.

Someone aimed.

Someone signed.
Someone funded.

Someone softened.
Someone knew.

Someone waited.

A moral sentence must have a spine.

If it can't stand beside the dead

and name the hand,

it has no right to speak.

—

The Expert With Clean Hands

The expert has clean hands; this is important for television.

No soil under the nails.
No flour on the cuff.

No blood on the sleeve; no child calling from under concrete inside the ear.

He arrives from a think tank with excellent windows.
He says strategic environment.

He says proportionality.
He says non-state actors.
He says kinetic response; he says human terrain.
Human terrain.
A phrase so bloodless
it should be forced to sleep
on the floor of the house
it describes.
The expert doesn't hate anyone; that's part of the terror.
He speaks with measured sorrow; he regrets civilian harm.
He emphasizes complexity.
He believes in stability.
Stability, that polished cousin of silence; the host thanks him for his insight.
No one asks the nurse.
No one asks the grocer.
No one asks the teacher whose classroom turned into a map of absence.
Nobody asks the father who knows the difference between a child and collateral
without needing a fellowship.
The expert leaves.
The studio light cools.
Somewhere, a mother lifts a blanket.
No analysis survives that gesture.
—

March of the Soft-Spoken Men

Verse I

They came in soft shoes,
with lanyards and tea,
with questions prepared
for the ones they would not see.
They said, keep calm; they said, let's be wise.
They built a little ladder
from a tower of lies.

Chorus

March, march, march go the soft-spoken men,
not with drums but with documents,
not with swords but with pens.
March, march, march while the cameras roll,
turn the wound into language
and language into control.

Verse II

They spoke of proportion
from a place without smoke.
They measured the fire
then called the poor folk broke.
They smiled at the panel,
they nodded on cue.
They said everybody suffers
when they meant not you.

Bridge

But a mother in the back row
stood without permission.

She said, my child is not a footnote
in your careful definition.

Final Chorus

March, march, march go the soft-spoken men,

but the street has learned the rhythm
and will interrupt again.

March, march, march till the polished phrases fall.

One honest mother rising
is louder than them all.

III. AIRPORT PSALMS

Airport Psalm

Blessed are the shoes removed before suspicion; blessed are the belts placed in gray bins.

Blessed are the mothers whispering,
don't speak too loudly,

not here,
not now.

Blessed are the fathers who smile too much at officers because dignity has children to protect.

Blessed are the boys named Mohammed, Omar, Yusef, Ali,

who learn the shape of waiting
before they learn the shape of welcome.
Blessed are the girls whose scarves are touched by policy.
Blessed are the grandmothers whose medicine is opened
as if illness itself might be hiding explosives.
Blessed are the passports held by hands that sweat
because history has entered the line ahead of them.
The airport says random.
The body says again; repetition is how suspicion learns to call itself policy.
The airport says security; the mother says lower your eyes.
The airport says procedure.
The son says nothing,
because silence is the first language
of people who want to arrive whole.
O God of departures,
God of checked bags,
God of names mispronounced under fluorescent judgment,
let the gate remember
that every traveler is not a threat.
Let the officer remember
he was once carried through a doorway
by someone who loved him.
Let the child pass

without learning to apologize
for the country in his face.

—

Random Check

Random check,
the officer says,
while looking directly
at the part of me
he has already chosen.
Random,
like my father's accent.
Random,
like my mother's prayer.
Random,
like the spelling of my name
in a database that never learned mercy.
They swab my bag; they swab my palms.
They ask where I am going; they ask where I have been.
They ask why I am nervous
while holding my freedom
in a plastic-gloved hand.
I want to say:
I am nervous because you keep calling it random.

I am nervous because the screen taught you to study my face.
I am nervous because I know the shape of innocent men
inside rooms with no windows.
I am nervous because my mother is watching
and I do not want her to see me become small.
Instead, I smile.
This is another kind of violence:
the performance of harmlessness
for the comfort of the suspicious; the officer waves me through.
I gather my shoes,
my belt,
my bag,
my name,
my anger,
my mother's eyes,
all the pieces of myself
the checkpoint scattered.
At the gate,
someone asks if I'm okay; I say yes.
The old lie boards first.
–

The Mother Lowers Her Voice

On the train,
my mother lowers her voice
when she says our language.
Not because the words are dangerous.
Because the room was taught to hear them that way; she says water softly.
She says tired softly.
She says God softly.
She says your uncle called softly; she says don't answer me in Arabic here softly.
I hate the softness.
I understand the softness.
A mother doesn't need theory
to know when a country has become an ear.
She knows which syllables make strangers turn.
She knows which vowels gather police in the imagination.
She knows the look people give
when the news has entered them
and they have not bothered to question its furniture.
At home,
her voice returns; it fills the kitchen.
It scolds the onions.
It blesses the rice.

It calls my name with all its original architecture.
But outside,
she edits herself; this is what manufactured fear does.
It hires the mother
as her own censor.
It makes a whole language
walk on tiptoe.

—

The Child Removes His Name Tag

The child removes his name tag
before the field trip.
Not because he is ashamed.
Not yet.
Shame is a lesson adults teach slowly.
He removes it because yesterday,
when the teacher called roll,
a boy in the back made a sound like an explosion
after his name.
The class laughed.
The teacher said enough,
but enough arrived late,
as enough often does.
At home,
his mother writes the name beautifully.

Letters like windows.
Letters like a road back to everyone who carried him here.
At school,
the name turns into heavy.
It catches on substitute teachers; it breaks inside
attendance software.
It triggers jokes about airports,
about desert men,
about beards he doesn't yet have,
about wars he did not start,
about flags he has never touched.
So on the bus,
he peels the sticker off; he folds it once.
Then again.
Then again.
A small homeland
creased into his pocket.
This is how fear enters the body:
not as a speech,
but as a child choosing
which part of himself
to hide before lunch.

IV. ENTERTAINMENT IS A SOFT BORDER

The Movie Villain Had an Accent

Verse I

The movie villain had an accent
before he had a face.

He entered with a desert behind him,
smoke in the marketplace.

He prayed in a language
nobody translated right.
The hero loaded freedom
and walked into the light.

Chorus

Before the bomb came the broadcast; before the drone
came the frame.

Before the child became a target,
someone rehearsed his name.

Before the war found a budget,
before the fear found a tongue,

the screen taught the audience
who deserved to be young.

Verse II

The mother never got dialogue.
The sister never got school.

The village never got morning,
only dust and a rule.

The city existed for chase scenes,
for gunfire and pursuit.

The people became background
with terror in the flute.

Bridge

What would happen
if the villain made tea?

If his daughter had homework?
If his father loved the sea?

What would happen
if the camera stayed

long enough to show
who paid?

Final Chorus
Before the bomb came the broadcast.

Before the drone came the frame.
Before the child became a target,

someone rehearsed his name.
Let the credits roll backward.

Let the old script burn clean.

No people is a villain
because a camera made them mean.

—

The Laugh Track Learns a Slur

The sitcom does not think it is doing harm.
that's the harm.

A neighbor enters with an accent; the audience laughs.

A taxi driver mispronounces love.
The audience laughs.

A brown man misunderstands freedom; the audience laughs.

A mother covers her hair; the audience laughs.

A name is shortened by force.
The audience laughs.

Laughter can be a small police.
It teaches the room who is allowed to be ordinary

and who must arrive as punchline; the child watches from the couch.

People who sound like his father
enter the country through jokes.

People who look like his uncle
exist to be corrected.

People who pray like his grandmother
are either tragic or absurd.

Later,
in school,

when someone imitates the accent,
the class laughs with trained precision.

They think the joke is new.
It has been syndicated for years.

—

The Classroom Map

The map at school is bright.
Too bright.
Countries in cheerful colors.
Borders like puzzle edges.
Oceans blue enough to suggest innocence.
The teacher points.
Here,
she says,
there has always been conflict.
Always is a dangerous word.
It erases the hand that arrived yesterday.
The child whose grandparents were born there
looks down at his desk.
He knows there was a bakery.
He knows there was a wedding song; he knows there was
a house with a fig tree.
He knows there were neighbors who borrowed ladders.
He knows there was a dog everyone claimed to hate
and fed anyway; but the map does not show ladders.
The map does not show dogs.
The map does not show grandmothers cursing the heat.

The map shows conflict.
In the textbook,
the region starts with violence.
As if no one ever woke there
and wondered what to cook; as if no one ever fell in love
near a fountain.
As if no child ever hated math
under the same sky now used to explain his danger.
The teacher means well.
This is how the lesson survives.
Later,
the child writes his real history
inside the margin.
Small handwriting.
Large country.

—

Trailer Voice

In a world
where every desert hides a threat,
where every prayer is background music for danger,
where every brown city is either ancient or exploding,
one man must save civilization
from people the script never bothered to know.
Coming this summer.
Bring popcorn.

Bring patriotism.
Bring the children.
Teach them early
which faces deserve suspense music.

—

No More Villain Music

No more villain music
when the foreign city appears.
No more low strings
under the minaret.
No more drums of suspicion
when the mother wraps her scarf.
No more desert filter.
No more market chase.
No more camera crouching
like the alley has already confessed.
Let the scene begin with breakfast.
And let the father burn the toast.
Let the daughter roll her eyes.
And let the uncle sing badly.
Let the grandmother win the argument
because grandmothers win even when wrong.
Let the city be boring
before anyone makes it symbolic.

Ordinary life is the propaganda
that empire fears most.
Because if the viewer sees the family laughing,
it becomes harder later
to explain why the missile
had no choice.

V. THE NEWSROOM BEFORE THE STRIKE

Green Room Before the Strike

In the green room,
there is fruit no one eats.
there's coffee no one finishes.
There is makeup under the eye of the expert
because fatigue must be corrected
before going live.
A producer says:
We need balance.
Balance means one person speaking from the wound
and three people explaining why the wound must be
understood in context.
A guest asks if they will show the children.
The producer says:
We have to be careful.
Careful with what?

With graphic images; with legal language.
With accusations.
With advertiser sensitivities.
With audience fatigue.
With access.
With the government line.
With the fact that one kind of death can be named
and another must be introduced slowly
so no one important feels ambushed by grief.
The guest nods; the guest needs the segment.
The guest has been trying for weeks
to say hospital on television
without being redirected to rockets; the host enters.
Warm smile.
Serious eyes.
A script full of careful doors.
Thirty seconds,
someone says.
The guest touches the photograph in his pocket.
A niece.
Eight years old.
Loved strawberries.
Hated bedtime.
No longer available for context.
The red light opens.

The machine starts.

—

The Headline Before the Drone

The headline arrived first; not the drone.

Not the order.
Not the explosion.

The headline.
Militants believed to be operating.

Security sources warn; area known for unrest.

Human shields suspected.
Terror infrastructure embedded.

Civilian casualties possible.
The public was given the sentence

before the body; this is important.

A prepared mind receives violence differently.
It has already made room.

It has already been told where to place doubt.
It has already been given a category

large enough to bury a child inside.

Then the drone came.
Then the roof opened.

Then the street filled with dust.
Then the mother ran barefoot.

Then the footage appeared; then the anchor said tragic.

But tragedy had been briefed; the headline arrived first.

It stood in the doorway
and softened the scream
before anyone heard it.

—

Lower Third

The lower third says:
REGIONAL TENSIONS ESCALATE.
Under it,
a father carries his daughter.
The lower third says:
CLASHES CONTINUE.
Under it,
a boy searches for his brother
with hands too small for this century.
The lower third says:
SECURITY OPERATION ENTERS NEW PHASE.
Under it,
a grandmother sits beside a door
that no longer remembers the wall.
The lower third says:
DEATH TOLL RISES.
Rises.
As if the dead lifted themselves.
As if the number climbed politely
without anyone pushing.

I want a lower third that tells the truth.

CHILDREN WERE SLEEPING.

BREAD WAS BLOCKED.

LANGUAGE IS BEING USED TO HIDE THE HAND.

THE VIEWER IS BEING ASKED TO FEEL LESS THAN THE MOMENT REQUIRES.

But there is no room on the screen
for a sentence with a conscience.

—

Think Tank Canticle

Blessed are the reports
printed on paper soft enough
not to cut the hand that signs the war.
Blessed are the fellows
with biographies longer than the villages they describe.
Blessed are the policy breakfasts,
the closed-door briefings,
the strategic memos,
the language that turns hunger
into leverage
and leverage
into leadership.
Blessed are the charts
where children disappear
into projected outcomes.

Blessed are the words
stability,
security,
deterrence,
normalization,
shared interests,
regional architecture.
Architecture again.
Always the builder's word
in the mouth of the man
who did not ask who lived there first.
The think tank has no windows facing the camp.
This helps the analysis.
Outside,
a delivery man brings lunch.
No one asks his name.

—

The Green Room Confession

After the show, the anchor sits alone in the green room.
The makeup is half gone. The tie loosened. The breaking news tone no longer protects him.
He thinks of the phrase he used.
Collateral.
He didn't invent it.
He only repeated it.

This is the defense of every age:
I only repeated the word they gave me.

But repetition isn't innocence; A shovel repeated enough becomes a grave.

A rumor repeated enough becomes policy.
A fear repeated enough becomes a checkpoint.

On the small television, his own face appears in replay. He watches himself speak calmly over images that should have destroyed calm.

For one second, he sees it; not the story.

The distance.
He sees the desk as a wall.

He sees the wall as a border.
He sees the border as a sentence.

He sees the sentence as a hand.
His phone buzzes.

A producer writes:
Good segment.

He does not answer; some conversions begin without applause.

Some begin when a man finally hears his own voice and finds a stranger living there.

VI. THE ALGORITHM FINDS THE WOUND

The Feed Learns My Pulse

The feed learns my pulse; it knows which death will keep me watching.
It knows which outrage I will share.
It knows when my grief turns into fatigue
and offers me a joke.
It knows when my joke becomes guilt
and offers me another body; the feed doesn't hate me.
That would require a soul.
It only optimizes.
Here is a child; here is a denial.
Here is a pundit; here is a fight in the comments.
Here is a recipe; here is a corpse.
Here is a celebrity apology.
Here is a thread explaining why nothing is simple.
Here is a donation link.
Here is a shoe ad.
The feed has discovered
that my conscience has a refresh rate; it doesn't need me cruel.
It needs me engaged.
Engaged enough to stay.
Engaged enough to feel; not engaged enough to act where action would interrupt the business model.
At midnight,

I close the app.
The room is quiet.
My thumb still scrolls the air.
—

Notification Theology

A notification enters
like a small prophet
with no discipline.
Breaking.
Urgent.
Graphic.
Watch.
Share.
React.
The phone glows
in the hand
like a church for emergencies.
I bow without meaning to.
This is the new posture of witness:
neck bent,
face lit,
heart dragged
from one disaster
to another

without a ritual for return.
The machine gives me suffering
but not silence.
It gives me evidence
but not a table.
It gives me rage
but not elders.
It gives me grief
but no place to put the grief
when the next alert comes.
No wonder the young are tired.
They have inherited the whole world's pain
without inheriting the village forms
that once taught pain how to breathe.
So I make my own liturgy.
Before I open the wound,
I breathe.
After I witness,
I act.
If I can't act immediately,
I write the name.
If I cannot write the name,
I pray without performance.
If I can't pray,

I place the phone down
and remember that the body beside me
is also part of the world.
Attention without tenderness
turns into another weapon.

—

Comment Section With Teeth

The comment section has teeth
but no stomach.
It bites everything
and digests nothing.
Under a video of a father screaming:
Where is the context?
Under a hospital hallway:
Fake.
Under a child with dust in his eyelashes:
What about.
Under a mother saying my son:
Bot.
Under a city on fire:
They brought it on themselves.
The cruelty isn't new.
Only faster.
Only monetized.

Only wearing profile pictures
of dogs, flags, flowers, sunsets, children.
I wonder what happens to a soul
that practices contempt in public
every morning before breakfast.
I wonder what happens to a civilization
when strangers learn to speak of dead children
as if they are defending a sports team.
I wonder who taught them.
Then I remember:
the screen taught them.
The headline taught them.
The movie taught them.
The classroom map taught them; the airport line taught them.
The expert taught them.
The algorithm did not invent the wound.
It found it,
fed it,
and called the feeding engagement.

VII. BODY EFFECTS

Self-Erasure Handbook

Step one:
shorten your name.

Step two:
laugh before they laugh.

This gives the illusion of control.

Step three:
when someone asks where you are really from,

decide how much history you can afford to carry that day.

Step four:
practice saying terrorism is wrong
before anyone asks,

so the sentence can leave your mouth quickly
and make room for your actual grief.

Step five:
make your lunch smell less like home.

Step six:
translate your grandmother into something softer.

Step seven:
if the news is bad,

stay quiet in class.
Your face may become a bulletin board

for other people's fear.

Step eight:

don't be angry.
Anger confirms the lesson.
Step nine:
don't be too calm.
Calmness seems suspicious.
Step ten:
smile.
Step eleven:
if smiling hurts,
smile anyway.
Step twelve:
when you get home,
let your mother call you by your whole name.
Let the room put your missing pieces back.

—

How to Make Your Name Easier

How to make your name easier:
Remove the throat.
Remove the grandfather.
Remove the village.
Remove the long vowel where your mother kept the sea.
Remove the letter the teacher can't climb.
Remove the sound that makes the border guard blink.
Remove the history that arrives before you do; remove the prayer hidden in the middle.

Remove the part that means servant of mercy.
Remove the part that means gift.
Remove the part that means light; remove the part that means return.
There.
Now you are easy.
Now the classroom can say you without effort.
Now the employer can call you back.
Now the airport can process you faster.
Now the neighbor can stop apologizing for not trying.
Now you have become small enough
to pass through the mouth
of a country
that never intended to learn you; keep the real name somewhere.
Under the tongue; under the pillow.
Inside the song.
Inside the hand of the grandmother
who refuses every abbreviation.
A name is a house.
don't let convenience evict you.

—

Beard, Bag, Brown Skin

Beard,
bag,

brown skin,
boarding pass.
The line studies me
with the education of twenty-five years.
No one says anything.
That is the sophistication.
A woman moves her child to the other side.
A man watches my hands.
A teenager whispers and looks away.
An officer says sir with extra caution.
I become aware of every movement.
How I reach for my phone.
How I open my bag.
How I cough.
How I stand; how I don't stand.
How long I look at someone.
How quickly I look away.
Suspicion is a second skeleton.
It teaches the body to carry itself
around other people's imagination.
By the time I sit down,
I am tired from a war
no one declared in the room.
A child across the aisle smiles at me.
For one second,

the whole system loses.

—

The Body Learns the Broadcast

The body learns the broadcast
before the mind admits it.
Shoulders rise at sirens; throat tightens at extra screening.
Hands sweat at the sound of a name on the news.
A child rehearses innocence
while tying his shoes; this is not paranoia.
This is education.
The body has watched the world connect certain dots
until the dots turned into a net; name to suspicion.
Accent to threat.
Prayer to politics.
Anger to danger; grief to extremism.
Self-defense to aggression.
Victimhood to doubt.
The body becomes careful.
Then smaller.
Then split.
One self for home.
One self for public; one self for the airport.
One self for the office.
One self for mourning; one self for explaining why it
deserves to mourn.

Manufactured fear does not end at the screen.
It moves into posture.
It rents the jaw.
It teaches the lungs
which rooms are safe enough
for full breath.

VIII. THE COUNTER-ARCHIVE

The Face Before the Frame

Before the frame,
there was the face.
Before the chyron,
there was the name.
Before the clip,
there was a morning.
Before the analysis,
there was a mother saying
eat before you go.
This is my method now:
I return the face before the frame.
When they say threat,
I ask whose son.
When they say border,

I ask whose road.
When they say collateral,
I ask what song the child hated.
When they say ancient hatred,
I ask who drew the most recent line.
When they say security,
I ask who sells safety
and who pays with flesh.
When they say necessary,
I ask them to say it
inside the hospital.
The face before the frame.
The child before the category; the room before the rubble.
The people before the policy; this is not sentiment.
This is resistance to the machine
that starts every violence
by making the human being easier not to see.

—

Precision Is Mercy

don't say the West is evil; that is too large and too lazy.
A vague enemy is where hatred goes to hide from evidence.
Say the ministry.
Say the newsroom.
Say the studio.

Say the briefing; say the lobby.

Say the algorithm.
Say the think tank.

Say the defense contract.
Say the film script.

Say the school map; say the airport policy.

Say the polling memo.
Say the headline.

Say the editor who removed the verb.
Say the guest who asked for context

while the body was still warm; don't curse a people.

Name the machine; A people can be lied to.

A people can resist the lie; A people can be trained to fear.

A people can unlearn fear.

A people can inherit propaganda
and still refuse to pass it to their children.

Precision is mercy
because precision keeps grief

from becoming a weapon
against the innocent.

Precision is also judgment
because it leaves the guilty

with fewer shadows to hide inside.

—

Precision Leaves No Hiding Place

Name the hand that acts; say it cleanly.

Say it first; say it before the wound is rented by hatred.

Do not put a prayer on trial.
The child didn't sign the order.

The grandmother lighting candles didn't sign it.
The grandfather walking to prayer didn't sign it.

The student wearing a star, cross, crescent, nothing, or all of history in one tired face did not sign it.

But no fear is innocent
when it has been trained by power

and refuses to examine its teacher.
No suspicion is innocent

when it keeps choosing the same bodies.
No headline is innocent

when it removes the hand from the killing.
No entertainment is innocent

when it rehearses dehumanization

then claims to be only a story.
No algorithm is innocent

when it feeds contempt
and invoices attention.

No expert is innocent
when his calm makes mass suffering easier to manage.

No citizen is innocent forever
if the lie keeps arriving
and the citizen keeps making it comfortable; A people aren't the deed.
No fear is innocent.
Between these two truths,
a moral life starts.

—

The Counter-Archive of Tenderness

For every file of fear, make a counter-file of tenderness; save the wedding song.
Save the grandmother laughing with no teeth.
Save the boy who mispronounces the new language and refuses shame.
Save the father in the airport line holding his daughter's stuffed animal because she got tired.
Save the shopkeeper giving free bread to the woman who forgot her wallet; save the mosque opening its doors during the storm.
Save the synagogue collecting coats; save the church basement smelling of soup and wet socks.
Save the atheist neighbor fixing the old man's lock; save every proof that people are wider than the categories made to contain them.

The fear archive is organized.
We must become more organized than fear.

Not sentimental.
Sentiment is too thin.

Tenderness with receipts.
Mercy with dates.

Hospitality with names.

Evidence that the human face survived the edit.
One day, when the machine says monster,

we will open the counter-archive and answer:
Here is the birthday.

Here is the lunchbox.
Here is the love letter.

Here is the badly sung anthem; here is the child with chalk on his hands.

Here is the mother asking everyone to eat.
No monster lives here.

Only people.
And what power did to them.

—

Lecture After the Screen Goes Dark

Class begins after the screen goes dark; no projector. No flags. No expert. No footage.

Only a room full of people who have been taught badly and are brave enough to become students again.

The first lesson:

Fear has a curriculum; it begins with images.

It continues with jokes; it matures through policy.

It graduates into silence.

The second lesson:

Dehumanization is not always loud.

Sometimes it is a missing photograph.

Sometimes it is the order of a headline.

Sometimes it is who gets a childhood in the story

and who gets a motive.

The third lesson:

You aren't guilty for every lie you inherited,

but you become responsible once the lie is named.

The fourth lesson:

Precision protects the soul.

Do not hate a people.

Name the system; name the policy.

Name the hand; name the money.

Name the edited sentence.

The final lesson has no exam.

You will know you learned it

when the next broadcast tries to make a monster

and you ask,

Who benefits if I stop seeing the child?

—

Hymn for the Public Imagination

God of the image before it is framed,
God of the story before it is sold,
God of the child before the caption,
heal the public imagination.

Wash the old fear from our eyes.
Remove the villain mask from the stranger.
Return mothers to the sentence.
Return jokes to the children.
Return kitchens to the map.
Return bread to the analysis.
Return names to the number.
Forgive us for every time
we let the screen do our seeing.
Forgive us for every time
we mistook calm language for truth.
Forgive us for every time
we were moved by music
but not by the wounded.

Teach us a mercy
strong enough to survive information.
Teach us attention
that doesn't become consumption.
Teach us anger
that doesn't become hatred.

Teach us peace
that does not require erasure.
Let the next generation inherit
not our suspicion,
but our correction.
Amen.
Ameen.
Let the lesson change.

—

The Screen Unlearns the War

One day,
the screen must unlearn the war.
It must show the kitchen before the smoke.
It must show the child's drawing before the rubble.
It must show the old man feeding pigeons before the checkpoint.
It must show the wedding, the market, the schoolyard, the argument over onions, the cousin who always arrives late, the grandmother who forgets nothing, the teenager in love with terrible music, the father pretending not to be afraid.
It must show the whole human being
before anyone is allowed
to discuss what may be done to him.
One day,

the expert must sit lower; the mother must sit higher.

The map must make room for the memory.
The headline must give the verb back to the hand.

The movie must retire its old villain.
The airport must apologize to the child.

The classroom must redraw the region with kitchens in it.
The algorithm must learn a word it can't monetize:

mercy.

One day,
the public imagination must be repaired.

Not with denial.
With truth.

Not with a new propaganda.
With faces.

Not with selective innocence.
With precise responsibility.

The screen taught the war.
It can also be made to testify.

Let the first testimony be this:
we were taught to fear.

We can be taught to see.

—

Finale: The Bells Belong to the People

Verse 1

The bells were kept in towers
where the crowned men wrote the rain.

They rang them over victories,
over markets, over pain.

But one by one the ropes came down
to hands with honest scars.

The people pulled the morning loose
from underneath the wars.

Chorus

Ring for the child restored to name.
Ring for the fear undone.

Ring for the mother at the gate
who would not lose her son.

Ring for the headline stripped of fog.
Ring for the truth made plain.

The bells were never born for kings; they were born to wake the plain.

Verse II

Ring for the airport kind at last.
Ring for the classroom brave.

Ring for the movie without masks; ring for the unnamed grave.

Ring for the anchor who confessed.

Ring for the screen gone still.
Ring for the people learning peace

with discipline and will.

Bridge

No people is the fire.
No prayer is flame.

The system taught the war.
The people can unlearn the name.

Final Chorus

Ring for the child restored to name.

Ring for the fear undone.
Ring for the stranger brought so near

we can't call him none.

Ring till the old broadcast breaks.
Ring till the dawn walks in.

The bells were never born for kings; let the people ring again.

CLOSING PIECE

BEFORE THE BOMB CAME THE BROADCAST

Before the bomb came the broadcast.
Before the broadcast came the briefing.

Before the briefing came the memo; before the memo came the map.

Before the map came the hunger.
Before the hunger came the old belief

that some people may be arranged
for the comfort of others.

This is what I want broken.
Not one screen.

Not one channel; not one anchor.

The deeper thing.
The lesson beneath the lesson.

The grammar that makes a people easier to fear
than to know.

I want the child to keep his name tag on; I want the mother to speak loudly on the train.

I want the airport to stop calling repetition random; I want the classroom map to confess who held the pencil.

I want the movie villain to become a father who hates bills,
loves his daughter,
and burns the rice when he gets distracted.
I want the expert to stop saying human terrain
until he has carried one human being to safety.

I want the headline to kneel; I want the algorithm to starve without contempt.

I want the living room to ask:
who taught me to flinch?

Then I want the living room to become human again.
Not innocent.

No room is innocent after history.
But responsible.
Awake.
Capable of seeing a child from another people
and refusing the old training.
The war was taught.
So must peace be.
Teach it with bread.
Teach it with names.
Teach it with films where no people is born villain.
Teach it with classrooms that don't mistake occupation for weather; teach it with newsrooms brave enough to keep the verb.
Teach it with airports that remember dignity.
Teach it with homes where children learn:
no people are born as targets,
no prayer is evidence,
no suffering is content,
and no screen is allowed to become the soul.
Before the bomb came the broadcast.
Before the next peace,
let there be a different lesson.

The Bells Were Not Neutral

The bells weren't neutral.

They rang from towers where no child had been buried,
from studios where the weather was adjusted
until grief looked like policy.

They rang before the evidence crossed the room.
They rang before the mother learned
which word would be used for her son.
They rang before the map remembered
it had been drawn over someone's kitchen.

Every empire loves a bell
because a bell can sound holy
while summoning people toward fear.

Ring it once, and the room looks up.
Ring it twice, and the face becomes a category.
Ring it three times, and somebody says security
with clean hands.

But there were other bells too:
spoons against pots,
keys at checkpoints,
anklets on girls running through dust,
the low metal sound of a gate opening
when nobody expected mercy.

I am listening for those bells now.
Not the ones that crown panic.
Not the ones that teach a nation to flinch.

The ones that call the ordinary face
back into the light.
The ones that say:
No people is a headline.
No child is a warning siren.
No prayer is evidence.

Ring that bell.
Ring it until the broadcast loses its throne.

The Weight of Falling Things

A chamber for life beneath falling skies

Opening Note: After the First Collapse

After the first collapse, the sky stopped being above us.

It turned into weight.

It became ceiling, weapon, witness, rumor, judgment, machine. It became the thing children studied before sleep, the thing mothers negotiated with, the thing fathers cursed under their breath because a man can survive many humiliations but not the feeling that he can't protect the roof over his child.

This isn't written to turn grief into another weapon.

A prayer doesn't carry the crime of the hand that weaponizes it.

No child inherits the crime of a state.

But the body knows when history has entered the room with boots on.

The body knows when grief has become infrastructure.

The body knows when a people are not only being killed, but pressed downward, layer after layer, explanation after explanation, until the whole world starts to sound like snow falling over a buried house.

And still someone underneath is breathing.

That is where I begin.

Not with the explosion.

With the breath beneath it.

—

I. The Sky Fell in Layers

The sky didn't fall all at once.
That would have been mercy.

It fell in layers.
First the sound.

Then the window.
Then the light.

Then the wall.
Then the names of streets.

Then the names of families.
Then the names of families who had already lost families.

Then the map.
Then the signal.

Then the bakery; then the hospital.

Then the sentence everyone kept saying:
Where do we go?

Nobody answered; the road answered with dust.

The checkpoint answered with silence; the sea answered with salt.

The leaders answered from clean rooms
where even their lies had electricity.

And the sky kept coming down; not like rain.

Rain knows when to stop.
This was a white-black pressure,

a weather of metal,
an old punishment wearing modern wings.

A child asked if night was angry.
His mother said no.

The child asked if God was angry.
His mother said no.

The child asked why the house was shaking.
The mother pulled him close

and lied the way mothers lie
when truth would become another bomb.

She said:
The house is cold.
it's only trying to stay warm.
—

II. Radio Prayer Under Rubble

The radio still worked.
This was the first miracle
and the first cruelty.
A man under the broken stair
could hear the world
discussing his death
before he had finished dying.
He heard the host say
developing situation.
He heard the expert say
strategic pressure.
He heard a caller say
both sides.
He laughed.
Not because it was funny.
Because dust had entered his mouth
and laughter was the only shape
left for air.
Beside him,

his daughter breathed once every few seconds.
He counted.
One.
Two.
Three.
The radio crackled.
Four.
Five.
Six.
Somewhere above them
men were digging.
Somewhere far away
men were debating.
Seven.
Eight.
Nine.
The girl whispered,
Baba, is it morning?
He did not know.
There was no light.
There was only the radio,
the concrete,
the taste of iron,
and a small hand

still looking for his.
He said:
Yes.
Because a father must sometimes create dawn
from nothing
but the refusal
to let darkness be the last authority.

—

III. The Falling Taught the Children Weather

Before this,
weather was simple.
Rain meant buckets; heat meant flies.
Wind meant the laundry might escape.
Cold meant the grandmother would complain
and everyone would pretend
not to be cold too.
Now weather has engines.
The children know the difference
between drone, jet, shell, tank, siren, silence.
Silence is the worst weather.
Silence is when adults listen
for what has not yet arrived.
Silence is when a mother stops stirring the pot.
Silence is when the grandfather's prayer beads
pause in his hand

as if even God
should not be interrupted too loudly.
The falling taught the children
to read the sky like scripture.
A low hum means hide; A high scream means run.
A flash means no time.
A delay means count the missing.
A boy who once knew the names of footballers
now knows which sound belongs
to which distant sponsor's generosity; this is what empire does.
It educates the child
in the grammar of falling.
It teaches him
that every cloud
might be a door opening
in the wrong direction.
And still, somehow,
after the blast,
after the dust,
after the long animal cry
of the street,
the same boy asks
if anyone found the ball.
This is not innocence.

This is resistance
before ideology.
The child still believes
something round
should return when kicked.

—

IV. The Hospital Sleeps Standing Up

The hospital sleeps standing up; the beds are full.
The floor is full; the hallway is full.
The stairwell is full.
The courtyard is full
of people trying to decide
which wound deserves a roof.
A doctor washes his hands
in water that has already become a question.
A nurse writes a name
on tape
and presses it to a child's chest
because faces may not remain faces
by morning.
A father holds an IV bag
above his son
like a lantern
for a saint
who has not yet learned

he is dying.
Nobody has slept.
Sleep is now a rumor
from another life.
The surgeon closes his eyes
for eight seconds
and sees his own daughter
asking for pancakes.
He opens them.
There is no room
for pancakes.
there's only the body
on the table
and the next body
and the next body
and the next.
Outside,
the generator coughs
like an old prophet
who has given every warning
and is still ignored.
Inside,
a woman whispers Qur'an.
Another whispers nothing.
Another whispers a name

that no longer belongs
to anyone answering.

Do not call this collapse.
Collapse is what buildings do.

This is endurance

being dragged by the hair
through rooms

that should have been holy
because healing was meant to happen there.

And still the doctor reaches
for the thread.

And still the nurse says
stay with me.

And still the hospital,
broken animal,

blood-lit ship,
last republic of the wounded,

refuses to lie down.

—

V. The Black Snow

Ash fell on the camp
like winter had lost its mind.

Children held out their hands.
They had seen snow on phones,

in cartoons,
in distant places
where cold arrives without fire; they asked if this was snow.
No one answered quickly enough.
The ash touched their palms
and stayed there.
A little black weather.
A little burned house
resting on the skin.
A little school.
A little curtain.
A little wedding dress.
A little olive tree.
A little book.
A little man
who had been sitting by the door
one minute before history
changed its shape.
The children rubbed their fingers together.
The ash disappeared into lines
their hands had not yet lived long enough
to earn.
This is the cruelty of war:

it gives children old hands.
It puts a century
inside their fingernails.
It makes them carry
what adults refuse to name; the ash kept falling.
Softly.
Almost beautifully.
That was the worst of it.
How gently destruction can arrive
after the violence is done.
How tenderly the remains
of a neighborhood
can settle on the hair
of a child
who only wanted snow.

—

VI. Chorus for the Buried Morning

Verse 1

We woke with bread in the room,
we woke with dust on the light.
The kettle called for water,
then disappeared into night.
My mother said keep breathing,
my father held the wall.
The morning had a heartbeat,

then we could not hear it at all.

Pre-Chorus

If the sky comes down,
we become the ground.

If the road burns through,
we carry what is true.

Chorus

Do not bury the morning.
Do not bury the name.

Do not call it thunder
when the hand has flame.

We are still under,
we are still here.

The dark came falling,
but the breath stayed near.

Verse II

The schoolbag split open,

the books learned to bleed.

The chalk wrote nothing
but the lesson of need.

My sister kept singing
with smoke in her hair.

She said if God is listening,

He must be everywhere.

Bridge

The child didn't sign it; but the order had paper.
The weapon had a name.
The prayer did not fire the weapon.

But someone closed the crossing.
Someone locked the door.

Final Chorus

Do not bury the morning.
Do not bury the name.
Do not call it sorrow
when sorrow has a frame.
We are still under,
we are still here.
The dark came falling,
but the breath stayed near.

—

VII. The Apartment Without a North Wall

The apartment lost its north wall.
This made the family public.
The soup pot could be seen from the street.
The mattress.
The school uniforms.
The old mother's medicine.
The photograph of the uncle

who died before this war
and so was spared
the insult of being killed twice
by memory.
Everyone could see the blue tiles
in the bathroom.
Everyone could see the child's drawing
still taped to the refrigerator.
Everyone could see
where ordinary life had been interrupted
without permission.
This is what bombing does
even when it does not kill.
It exposes.
It strips the private room
from the human being.
It makes grief stand outside
without clothes.
A neighbor walked by
and looked away
because dignity sometimes means
not witnessing everything
the world has forced open.
The father climbed the stairs
to what remained.

He stood in the living room
with the city looking in.
For a long time
he said nothing; then he picked up the photograph.
Then the medicine; then the drawing.
Then one spoon.
The spoon mattered.
Do not ask why.
After the end,
small things become shelters.

—

VIII. The Men Who Speak of Pressure

The men who speak of pressure
don't live under it.
This must be said first.
They speak of pressure
from rooms where the glass is thick,
where the coffee comes warm,
where the chair is designed
to protect the back
from remembering the body.
Pressure, they say.
As if hunger were a finger
placed gently on policy.

As if thirst were a negotiation.
As if a child's fever
were a lever
waiting for the correct diplomat
to pull.
Pressure.
Come here.
Stand in the bread line
while your youngest starts
to sway from not eating.
Stand at the hospital door
while the nurse says
there is nothing left.
Stand by the water truck
when the crowd surges
because thirst has become
stronger than shame.
Stand in the tent
when rain enters
from three corners
and your mother tries to laugh
so the children will think
this is adventure.
Then say pressure.

Say it with the mud
between your toes.
Say it with the empty bottle
in your hand.
Say it while a father
offers his wedding ring
for antibiotics
that no one has.
Pressure is not a policy.
Pressure is a child
trying not to cry
because crying uses water.

—

IX. Night in the Hills

In the hills,
night has boots.
It enters by road.
It enters by gate.
It enters through the phone
when a cousin says
they are nearby; the village lowers its voice.
The dog stops barking
because even animals learn
which sounds invite danger.
A boy lies awake

with his shoes beside the bed
in case childhood must flee
before morning.
His mother pretends to sleep.
His father sits near the window
with the lights off.
The hills are dark
except for the places
that aren't allowed to be dark,
the places with fences, towers, cameras,
roads bright as accusation.
An old man says
this land remembers better than men.
Nobody answers.
They are tired
of being comforted by stones.
Still, the stones remain.
Still, the olive roots go down
like testimony.
Still, the dawn comes
over the checkpoint
without asking the soldier
for permission.
This is not freedom.
But it's something

power hates:
a morning it did not authorize.
—

X. The Mothers Learn Triage

The mothers learn triage.
This is a sentence
that should shame the world
until the moon refuses us.
They learn
which child needs the water most; which fever can wait.
Which wound must be pressed.
Which lie will keep the younger one
from screaming.
They learn
how to cut bread
into pieces so thin
light almost passes through them.
They learn
how to make a tent
feel like a house
for twelve minutes
at a time.
They learn
which road is less likely.
Less likely.

The new mathematics of motherhood.
Not safe.
Less likely.
They learn
to smile when aid comes
with cameras.
They learn
to say thank you
while swallowing the rage
of being made grateful
for what should never
have been withheld.
They learn
to write names on wrists.
They learn
to sleep with one ear
outside the body.
They learn
that grief has no final form.
It becomes cooking; it becomes counting.
It turns into carrying.
It becomes rage folded small enough
to fit inside prayer.
Do not call them resilient

unless you are prepared
to accuse the world
that required it.

—

XI. The Sea Cannot Leave

The sea keeps arriving.
Every morning,
like it has not heard
what men have done
to the shore; it comes blue.
Shamelessly blue.
How dare beauty continue
with so many bodies
unaccounted for.
How dare the waves
practice return
when refugees can't.
How dare the sun
walk over the water
with gold in its hands
while children search
for drinkable rain.
And yet the sea stays.
Not innocent.

Nothing that has seen this much
can be innocent.
But faithful.
It keeps touching the edge
of the wounded land.
It keeps saying
in its old language:
I am still here.
You are still here.
Nothing owned by violence
is owned forever.
At night,
a man stands facing it.
He has lost too much
to pray properly.
So he listens.
The sea speaks
with a thousand broken mouths.
It says:
Breathe.
He hates this advice.
Then he does it.

—

XII. The Child Draws the End of the War

The child draws the end of the war.

It doesn't look like a treaty; there are no presidents.
No microphones.
No flags.
No men in suits
trying to smile
like they invented mercy.
In the drawing,
the war ends
because the sky gets tired
and lies down; the tanks become buses.
The drones become birds
with embarrassed faces.
The soldiers put their guns
in a pile
and the pile becomes a tree.
The checkpoints turn into bakeries.
The prison doors become windows; the sea becomes sweet.
The dead come home
but no one is scared
because in children's drawings
even the impossible
knows how to behave.
In the corner,
the child draws a house; the roof is very large.

Too large.
Absurdly large.
A roof over every broken quarter; A roof over every guarded hill.
A roof over every camp.
A roof over every mother
who has slept under the judgment
of machines.
A roof over the graves.
A roof over the living.
A roof over the people
who have spent too long
being treated
as weather damage
inside someone else's history.
The teacher asks
why the roof is so big.
The child says:
So the sky can't fall in again.

—

XIII. Names the Snow Could Not Cover

They tried to cover the names.
With numbers.
With smoke.
With doubt.

With exhausted viewers.
With statements.
With maps.
With briefings.
With the soft gray language
that falls over a crime
like snow
over a field of bones.
But some names stay warm; they melt through.
A grandmother whispers one
into lentils.
A father says one
while walking past the ruins
of the room where it last answered.
A sister writes one
on the inside of her schoolbook
though the school is gone.
A journalist says one
into a camera
then looks away
because the name belongs
to his own house.
A doctor repeats one
while washing the floor.
A child mispronounces one

and is corrected gently

because even in the end

the dead deserve accuracy.

This is how a people survive erasure:

not only with weapons,

not only with law,

not only with flags,

but with the stubborn heat

of names

refusing burial

beneath the weather

of power.

—

XIV. Almost Dawn

Almost dawn.

The phrase itself

is a small shelter.

Not dawn.

Almost.

Not freedom.

Almost.

Not safety.

Almost.

Not bread.

Almost.
Not return.
Almost.
A people can live
a long time
inside almost.
Almost enough aid; almost open crossing.
Almost ceasefire.
Almost hospital.
Almost school.
Almost home.
Almost believed.
Almost human
in the eyes
of those who require
the dead
to arrive with perfect documents.
But almost
is not nothing.
Ask the father
who hears tapping
under concrete.
Ask the nurse
who finds one more bandage.
Ask the child

who sees one orange
in the market
and announces
that the world is returning.
Almost can become
a match.
Almost can become
a door.
Almost can become
one minute more
of sun
after the longest night.
So I keep almost
in my pocket.
Not as comfort.
As contraband.
As proof
that the end
has not completed
its paperwork.

—

XV. Closing Hymn: Let the Weight Break Open

Let the weight break open; not the people.
The weight.
Let the sky return

to being sky.
Let the roof return
to being trust.
Let the road return
to feet.
Let the hospital return
to healing
instead of endurance.
Let the child return
to multiplication,
to football,
to sulking,
to asking too many questions
about insects.
Let the mother return
to ordinary complaints.
Let her say
you didn't fold this properly.
Let her say
who left the cup there.
Let her say
come eat
with no tremor
behind the words.
Let the father return

to fixing the hinge
because hinges,
not borders,
should be the problem
of a house.
Let the sea return
to fishermen.
Let the orchard return
to harvest.
Let the cemetery
receive only the old
for a while.
God of the buried breath,
God of the cracked radio,
God of the black snow
and the stubborn root,
don't let this falling
become forever.
Do not let grief
be recruited
by men who love fire
more than children.
Do not let rage
forget the face

of the innocent.
don't let the world
make peace
into a curtain
drawn over the crime.
Let justice come
with clean hands
and dirty feet.
Let mercy come
with trucks.
Let truth come
with names.
Let morning come
not as metaphor,
but as water,
bread,
medicine,
home.
And if the weight
must fall once more,
let it fall
not on the child,
but on every lie
that made the child
carry it.

The Megaphone Under the Rubble

A harsh chamber of witness, carnage, and refusal

Opening Note: This Is Not the Soft Room

This is not the soft room.

Do not enter looking for incense.
Do not enter looking for the beautiful sentence
that carries the dead gently
as if the page were a clean white sheet.

There are no clean sheets here.

There is the sheet over the body.
There is the sheet missing from the hospital.
There is the sheet turned banner, bandage, shroud,
surrender, signal.
There is the sheet a mother refuses to lift
because she has already recognized the shoe.

This isn't written to turn grief into another weapon.
No prayer signs the order.
No child is born carrying a war crime.

But powers have hands.
Armies have pilots.

Factories have invoices.
Leaders have mouths.
Newsrooms have scissors.
Empires have old habits
and new aircraft.

This is for every street taught
that the sky can become an executioner.
This is for every house
where children learn the weather of machines.
This is for every city
made small inside another capital's strategy.

This is not clean witness.

This is the megaphone
under the rubble.

The Morning Was Made to Choke

They darkened the morning.

Not the sky alone.
The bread.
The schoolbag.
The hospital sink.
The bride's sleeve.
The old man's prayer beads.
The wall where a child had drawn a sun
too large for the page
because children still believe
light should win by size.

They darkened the milk.
They darkened the water.

They darkened the mother's hands
until even tenderness looked accused.

Somewhere a man in a room
said target package.
Somewhere a man in another room
said acceptable range.
Somewhere a man with no ruin in his lungs
said the operation was precise.

Precise.
A word with gloves on.

The bomb was precise enough
to find the bedroom.

Precise enough
to turn the alphabet
inside a child's notebook
into torn wings.

Precise enough
to leave one spoon standing
in a kitchen with no kitchen around it.

Do not tell me smoke is only smoke.
I've seen smoke become a city.

I've seen smoke become a father
running with half a name in his mouth.

I've seen smoke become the new flag
of people whose flags are called threats
before they are allowed to grieve.

They darkened the morning.

Then they asked
why the children no longer trusted dawn.

The Official With Clean Teeth

The evil does not always arrive ugly.
Sometimes it comes well-lit.

Sometimes it says
we regret civilian harm.

Sometimes it says
the investigation is ongoing.

Sometimes it says
the area was known.

Known by whom?

Known by the mother
who hung laundry there?

Known by the baker
who opened before sunrise?

Known by the boy
who kept his marbles in a tin?

Known by the daughter
who had just learned to write her name
without asking for help?

The official smiles.

He says human shields
and the room exhales
because the phrase is a broom
made for sweeping children
out of conscience.

He says unfortunate.

He says tragic.

He says armed conflict
as if armed conflict were weather
and not something men build
with budgets, votes, fuel, metal, silence,
and the cowardice of clean language.

He thanks the press.
He leaves.

The cameras fold their legs.

The dead remain available
for context.

The Cry Crossed Every Border

A cry rose from the hospital.

It passed through borders
where men in booths
studied papers more carefully
than bodies.

It passed through a parliament
where officials adjusted their ties
and called it complex.

It passed through a newsroom
where an editor removed the verb.

It passed through a church
where the faithful prayed for peace
but not for courage.

It passed through a mosque
where grief knelt
and rose with the world on its forehead.

It passed through a synagogue
where an old woman whispered,
not in my name,
and meant it like a door opening.

It passed through a classroom
where a child asked
why some deaths get flags
and some deaths get explanations.

It passed through a market
where oranges sat in pyramids
as if the world were still capable
of arrangement.

No border could hold the cry; it kept walking.

It wore no shoes.

It carried a list of names
no embassy wanted to receive.

It knocked on the mouth
of every comfortable person
and said:

Say something.
Not later.

Not carefully enough
to save your chair.

Now.

Say child.
Say bomb.
Say famine.
Say siege.
Say war crime.
Say massacre.
Say human.

Say it until the cry
is no longer alone.

The Last Ordinary Breath

there's a breath
that decides whether a family remains plural.

One breath
the child is asking for water.

One breath
the mother is saying wait.
One breath
the father is looking for the charger.
One breath
the grandmother is complaining
that no one sweeps properly anymore.
One breath
the street still has a street's arrogance,
still believes people will walk on it tomorrow.
Then the breath breaks.
A flash.
A mouth of heat.
The room forgets geometry.
The roof comes down
with the confidence of an empire.
Afterward,
men speak in numbers.
Response time.
Rescue time.
Ceasefire time.
Broadcast time.
Time of death.
But the crime lived in the stolen breath; the last ordinary breath.

The breath before the child learned
the sky could enter a room
without knocking.

Give me back that breath.
Give it back.

Give back the cup still full.
Give back the joke half-finished.
Give back the footstep in the hall.
Give back the mother saying wait
with no idea
she was asking history
for mercy.

The Stone Eye Above the Orchard

There must be a road out,
said every farmer
whose orchard became a border.

But the concrete eye did not answer.
It watched.

That is what high places do
when men confuse height
with wisdom.

It watched the olive trees
grow old under suspicion.

It watched the children
learn which roads had teeth.

It watched the fathers
fold rage behind their molars.

It watched the mothers
turn fear into instructions:

Do not run.
Do not argue.
Do not look too long.
Do not say that word here.
Do not be brave
where bravery can be shot
and called procedure.

The orchard kept making fruit.
This was its rebellion.

The concrete eye kept making distance.

This was its religion.

At night,
the trees spoke beneath the wind.

They said:
We have seen Rome.
We have seen crusader, sultan, mandate, soldier, settler,
minister, thief.
We have seen maps arrive
like men who think paper is stronger than root.

The structure listened.

For the first time,
it was afraid.

Not of weapons.
Of patience.
The tree has a form of time
no empire can train.

Peace Cannot Be Decoration

Do not say love
if you will not move your body
toward the wound.
Do not say peace
if what you mean is quiet.
Do not say ceasefire
like it is the edge of morality.
A pause isn't enough
if the cage remains.
A corridor isn't enough
if the road leads only
from one controlled death
to another.
Love must have logistics.
Peace must have teeth.
Mercy must know
where the water trucks are.
I am tired of the soft version.
The version where men say peace
from behind guarded doors.

The version where the occupied
are told to be patient
while patience is used
as rope.

If love will not arrive,
then the word love dies.

If peace will not defend the living,
then the word peace turns into furniture.

If prayer will not become bread,
then every prayer grows embarrassed
to be heard from human mouths.

Bring the water.
Open the road.
Name the hand.
Stop the fire.
Break the cage.

Then speak to me of peace.

Children of Safe Roofs

Some children are born
under roofs that never learn sirens.

Some are born
with passports that open
like obedient flowers.

Some are born
under roofs that export fire
and import innocence.

Some are born
where violence is something watched,
not inhaled.

The safe child says
the world is dangerous.

The unsafe child says
yes, I know,
it fell on my house.

The safe child hears
security.

The unsafe child hears
my mother was sleeping.

The safe child hears
interests.

The unsafe child hears
my father's hands are missing.

The safe child hears
be realistic.

The unsafe child says
I am nine.

The safe child hears
history is complicated.

The unsafe child says
my brother was not.

Some children grow into ministers,
analysts, donors, chairmen,
men of reason,
men of difficult choices,
men who never have to choose
between flour and medicine
because their difficulty
belongs to other people's bodies.

Other children become numbers
unless someone refuses.

So I refuse; here is the child.

Not your theory.
Not your region.
Not your collateral.
Not your regrettable cost.

Child.

Say it
until the safe roofs
begin to tremble.

The Rope of Waiting

The ceasefire waits; the bread waits.

The water waits; the mother's question waits.

The prisoner's name waits.

The ambulance waits at the checkpoint
with its siren begging
like a throat scraped raw.

The child waits between fever
and medicine delayed for inspection.

The father waits between rage
and the rifle pointed at his son.

The city waits
inside a sentence
written in another language
by men who will never smell
the corridor after the strike.

They leave us waiting
for statements.

For negotiations.
For emergency sessions.

For corridors.

For aid drops.
For names not yet confirmed.

For bodies not yet found.

For promises that arrive
with clean shoes
and leave before the mud.

Hope becomes a rope burn.
Still, we hold.

Not because the rope is kind.

Because below us
the pit has been dug
by people who keep asking
why we are so angry.

Names for a Crime

They call it conflict.

No.

Conflict is the word
they use to make the crime
look equally dressed.

This is not two armies
meeting in a field
with the decency of mutual danger.

This is a city
being peeled open.

This is a hospital
becoming a tent
becoming a list
becoming a rumor.

This is a child
with ash in his eyelashes
being asked by history
to become evidence.

This is a mother
writing names on wrists

because the future
has become unreliable
about faces.

This is a road
where hunger walks faster
than aid.

This is a school
with no roof
still teaching the lesson
that civilization failed.

This is a leader
using the word necessary
until God Himself
turns away from the microphone.

This is a newsroom
calling the dead
a rising toll
as if the bodies climbed.

No.

This is the organized destruction
of the ordinary.

The loaf.
The bed.
The exam.
The wedding.
The cough syrup.

The clean diaper.
The grandmother's chair.
The little blue cup.
The boy's ridiculous dream
of becoming a goalkeeper.

This is what war crimes destroy first:
not buildings.

The assumption
that tomorrow
has consented
to arrive.

The Flag Over a Locked Heart

Do not sing to me
if the song can't hear the screams.

Do not lift the flag
over a child
the flag refuses to name.

Do not place your hand
over your heart
if your heart has become
a locked embassy.

I've heard official songs
played over invasions.

I've heard freedom
pronounced by men
standing on someone else's throat.

I have heard liberty
sell weapons.
I have heard justice
wait for polling.
I have heard God bless
every aircraft
before it entered the cloud.
The flag has teeth.
It smiles beautifully
while biting history.
But I have another song.
It begins in the bread queue.
It begins with a woman saying
feed the little one first.
It begins with a doctor
washing blood from his wrist
and walking back in.
It starts with a journalist
whose own family is dead
still lifting the camera
because the world must not be allowed
the luxury of not knowing.
It starts with a child
drawing a house
with a roof the sky can't enter.

It starts with an old man
planting mint
beside a crater
because fragrance
is also a refusal.

My song doesn't need a flag; it needs witnesses.

It needs water.

It needs every comfortable mouth
to stop humming
and start naming the hand.

A Summer of Glass

The city knows
how the window turns into a weapon.

Ask the port.

Ask the apartments
that wore their glass inward.

Ask the balconies
that carried coffee, cigarettes, gossip, plants,
then became teeth.

Ask the port.

Ask the bride
whose photograph turned
from celebration
to blast record
before the dress understood.

The city knows
how a city can be loved
and betrayed
in the same breath.

The mountain watches; the sea receives.

The old tree stands
like an old witness
tired of being made into symbol
while the living stand in line
for medicine, fuel, bread,
one hour of power,
one honest official,
one season without another funeral.

And still the music starts.
This is what they don't understand.

You can bomb the street
and still not own the rhythm.

You can break the glass
and still not enter the song.

You can turn a city into shrapnel
and still find someone
at midnight
singing from a balcony
as if the voice were a second infrastructure.

Glass city,
wounded singer,

bruise-bright harbor,
rose with blood in its mouth:
may every hand
that made you shatter
one day be forced
to hear you laugh.

The Old Shadow

The city has old ghosts.
Kings.
Clerics.
Poets.
Prisons.
Oil.
Students.
Mothers at graves.
Girls with hair like weather
men keep trying to govern.
The city knows the stone eye.
The city knows the sermon
that becomes a cage.
It knows the foreign hand
and the domestic fist.
It knows how empire comes
with one language
and tyranny answers
in another

until the people are trapped
between two men
arguing over who owns the door.

don't reduce any city
to a villain's map.

It is a mother
holding her daughter's photograph.

It is a student
writing freedom
where cameras cannot see.

It is a worker
whose pay comes late
because power always eats first.

It is a poem
older than the men
who fear women singing.

It is a place
where the dead keep joining protests
because memory has not been properly buried.

When the bombers speak of it,
they don't mention the kitchens.

When the tyrants speak of it,
they don't mention the girls.

When the analysts speak of it,
they don't mention the graves

where mothers have worn paths
into the earth.

So I mention them.

The kitchen.
The girl.
The grave.
The poem.
The hair.
The worker.
The mother.
The student.
The old shadow.
The new morning
still trying to enter
without being shot.

Wall-to-Wall Fire

Carpet bombing.

Say the phrase slowly
until the room begins to stink.

Carpet.

A thing in a living room.
A thing children sit on.
A thing that holds crumbs, hair, card games,
spilled tea, stories, sleep.

Bombing.

A thing that tears the living room
from the world
and throws the child
into the vocabulary of war.

Carpet bombing.

The language itself
is a crime scene.

They make destruction sound domestic.
They lay violence down
wall to wall.

No corner spared; no crib spared.

No hallway spared.

No old photograph spared.
No cat under the chair spared.

No hand reaching
from under the door spared.

No prayer spared.
No atheist spared.

No soldier's doubt spared.

No mother's milk spared; no child's future spared.

A phrase invented
by people far enough away
to confuse scale
with strategy.

But from below,
there is no strategy.

Only ceiling.
Only pressure.

Only heat.

Only the body
learning too late
that the world above it
has chosen not to be sky.

The Shouting Instrument

I found a cracked speaker under the rubble.
It still worked.

This surprised no one
who understands the dead.

The dead are always looking
for a louder object.

I lifted it.

The mouthpiece was cracked.
The handle sticky.
The cone dented
like it had shouted
through impact.

I pressed the button.
The city answered.

Not with words at first.
With coughs.
With names.
With metal settling.
With someone praying
from inside a hole.
With someone calling mother
though mother had become
part of the ruin.
Then the instrument spoke
in the voice of every interrupted morning:
Do not lower the volume.
Do not make this elegant.
Do not turn carnage
into a balanced paragraph.
Do not say devastation
when you can say
the baby had a blue sock.
Do not say tragedy
when you can say
someone ordered this.
Do not say rubble
without saying home first.
Do not say dead
without asking
who made them die.

I carry the instrument now; it is heavy.
Good.
A witness should not feel light
while children are being excavated
from the conscience of the world.

No More Beautiful Distance

No more beautiful distance.
No more satellite view.
No more map with red zones
where the red is cleaner
than the blood.
No more words
that leave the body out.
No more strategy
without a child's shoe
placed on the table.
No more security
without the grandmother
asking whose security
requires her kitchen gone.
No more ancient hatred
when the bomb
was manufactured last year.

No more complexity
as a blanket
over the shivering crime.

No more prayers
that float upward
and refuse to become bread.

No more grief
that performs itself
but never interrupts the shipment.

No more outrage
with no address.

No more sadness
that never risks anything.

No more perfect victim; no more careful murderer.

No more holy cruelty.
No more flags over faces.

No more.
No more.

No more.

And if the world calls this too harsh,
tell the world
to lower its eyes
to the child
whose body taught the sentence
how harshness is measured.

The Scream Becomes a Door

I wanted to end gently.
I tried.

I placed water on the table.
I opened the window.

I waited for the poem
to become prayer.

But the scream remained.

It stood in the room
with its hands blackened.

It said:

Do not forgive too early.
Do not soften me
for the comfort of those
who survived by looking away.

So I didn't soften it.
I gave it a chair.

I gave it bread.

I let it speak
until the walls stopped pretending
they had heard nothing.

Then something strange happened.
The scream became a door.

Not peace.
Not yet.

A door.

Behind it,
a doctor sleeping for one hour.

Behind it,
a girl washing her face
with half a cup of water
and still arranging her hair.

Behind it,
a boy finding a marble
in the ruins
and placing it in his pocket
like a planet rescued from God.

Behind it,
a father saying
we will build again
though his voice
did not believe him yet.

Behind it,
a glass city singing
through everything that shattered.

Behind it,
a girl lifting her own name
like a match in the wind.

Behind it,
a people standing
with ruin in their teeth

and a key in their hand
saying:
I am not your aftermath.
I am not your symbol; I am not your lesson.
I am a people.
And I am still here.
So let the speaker crack; let the throat tear.
Let the witness refuse
the anesthesia of polite language.
There are times
when the only holy thing left
is to scream truth
loud enough
that the buried know
they were not abandoned.

The Room of Taken Girls

A Lament for the Daughters

Do not bring drums.
Not yet.
Do not bring flags
with clean corners.
Do not bring speeches
folded neatly in the mouths
of men who were not there.
Bring water.
Bring cloth.

Bring the names.

Bring every mother
who has forgotten how to stand
without reaching first
for the child beside her.

Bring the morning back,
if you can.

Bring back the little arguments
over shoes,
over ribbons,
over who took whose pencil,
over whose hair was brushed too hard,
over whose lunch was wrapped
in the wrong bread.

Bring back the sound
of girls entering the day
without knowing
the day had already been chosen
by darkness.

don't let the loss sit cleanly.

Make it enter the room.
Make it take off its shoes.
Make it stand beside the empty desks.

Make it touch the wall
where small hands once dragged chalk dust
into clouds, houses, suns,

names written crookedly
because childhood is allowed
to be unfinished.

A corridor of braids.
A field of schoolbags.
A choir of throats
that had not yet learned
how much cruelty
can fit inside grown men.

The day did not happen in a sentence.

It happened in air.
In breath interrupted.
In dust rising
where laughter had been.
In the sudden animal silence
that follows a great harm,
when even the birds seem to know
that something has crossed
from crime
into wound.

I want you to stand there; not above it.

Not safely away
inside language.

Stand there.

Feel the grit
against your teeth.

Feel the floor
covered in little things
that should never become evidence.

A torn notebook; A sandal turned sideways.

A ribbon caught
beneath a chair leg.

A page with arithmetic on it,
the numbers still waiting
for a child
who will not return
to solve them.

A cup on its side.

Water spread thinly
across the floor
like the world's smallest sea.

A sweater sleeve.
A bent hair clip.

A piece of bread
untouched.

Do not look away.

The room itself
has become a mother.

It holds what it cannot save.
The walls are listening.

The windows are stunned.

The door is open
in the terrible way doors are open
after the living have rushed through them
carrying more grief
than arms were made to carry.

Somewhere,
someone is calling a name.

Then another.
Then another.

The first name has panic in it.
The tenth has prayer.

By the time the voices begin to break,
the body no longer believes
language can do this work.

God Himself must lean closer
to hear what stays
of the human throat.

I don't write this
to turn sorrow into a weapon.

No child anywhere
should be made responsible
for the hand
that harmed another child.
No prayer should be drafted
into the weapon.

But the crime happened.

Let the earth say that.
Let the walls say that.

Let the mothers say that.

Let the silence say that
until every excuse
falls on its knees.

The crime happened.

And what was taken
wasn't only life.

It was future.
It was first love.

It was the joke
one girl would have told badly
and laughed at anyway.

It was the doctor
one would have become.

The teacher.
The poet.

The stubborn auntie.

The woman who would have learned
to drive too fast.

The grandmother
who would have hidden sweets
in her sleeve.

The one who would have left home; the one who would have stayed.

The one who would have forgiven; the one who would not.

The one who would have sung
with no gift for singing
but with a joy so complete
even the kitchen would have listened.

All of that's in the room.

You can smell it
under the smoke.

The perfume of unlived years; the bread of unlived mornings.

The wet green scent
of gardens never planted.

The small human weather
of daughters
who were meant to outgrow
their mothers' arms.

I praise them.
But carefully.

I will not make death beautiful
because death came ugly.

I won't decorate the wound
until it looks acceptable
on a page.

I praise the girls
because innocence deserves witnesses.

I praise their laughter
because someone tried
to make silence louder.

I praise their faces
because a number isn't enough.

I praise their hands,
which held books, cups, combs,
little secrets,
each other.

I praise the mothers
who braided hair that morning
without knowing
they were preparing crowns
for martyrs.

Martyrs, yes.
But not weapons.

Never weapons.

Let no one lift these girls
like a torch
and go hunting
for another child.

Let no one carve revenge
from their names.

Let no one say
their blood demands more blood.

Blood isn't a language
we should keep teaching
to the living.

Let their martyrdom be purer
than our anger.

Let it be the kind
that accuses without becoming cruel.

Let it be a mirror
so unbearable
that the guilty can't eat.

Let it be a bell
that rings in the ribs
of every coward
who looked away.

Let it be a door
through which peace must enter
barefoot, trembling, late,
but real.

I am afraid
of what comes after grief.

That is the second darkness; the first darkness kills.

The second darkness recruits.

It arrives at the funeral
with a mouth full of fire.

It whispers to the brother:
Become a blade.

It whispers to the father:

Become a grave
for someone else.

It whispers to the mother:

Let your pain burn the world
until the world knows
your child's name.

But no.
No.

Not from these girls.
Not in their names.

Not with their ribbons
still caught in the dust.

Let no child die
because another child was taken.

Let no house be entered
because this house was emptied.

Let no mother
be handed the same impossible cloth
in another language.

Let no horror be carried
to the carriers of injustice.

Let no crowd drag them
through streets.

Let no revenge pretend
to be prayer.

Let punishment be guilt
and nothing more.

And let guilt be merciless.

Let it enter quietly
after the applause is gone.

Let it remove its shoes
and sit at the foot of the bed.

Let it wait
until the guilty reach for sleep.

Then let it speak.
Not with thunder.

With the voice of a girl
asking why.

Let guilt be the plate
they cannot finish.

Let guilt be the laughter
that dies in their throat.

Let guilt be the mirror
turning its face away.

Let guilt be the door
they hear at night
though no one knocks.

Let guilt be the unnamed day
returning every year
not as ceremony,
but as witness.

Let guilt be a classroom of chairs
appearing in the rooms
where men believed
they had escaped history.

Let guilt be a school corridor
inside the heart.

Let guilt be chalk dust
on the fingers
of the soul.

Let guilt be the terrible mercy
of knowing.

That is enough.
No blade.

No mob.

No second massacre
wearing the clothes of justice.

Let those who did this
settle it with their Maker.

Let them arrive
at the place beyond argument
with no lawyer,
no flag,
no doctrine,
no uniform,
no friend in power,
no soft word
to hide the hard thing.

Let them stand
before the One
who heard every last breath
as clearly
as the first cry
when each girl entered the world.

Let the question be simple there.
Not political.

Not strategic.
Not complicated.

Only this:

What did you do
with what I made?

And let them answer
if they can.

As for us,
let us remain human
at the edge of the pit.

That is harder
than rage.

That is harder
than slogans.

that's harder
than becoming the fire
that burned us.

Let peace come.

Not the decorative peace
of men shaking hands
above buried truth.

Not the coward peace
that tells mothers
to lower their voices.

Not the cheap peace
that hurries the dead
into history
before the living have named them.

Let peace come
with dirty knees.

Let peace come
carrying water.

Let peace come
and sit beside the mothers
without speaking first.

Let peace learn
each name.

Let peace gather the ribbons.

Let peace put the notebooks
back on the desks.

Let peace open the windows.
Let peace say:

No more daughters
made into dates.

No more classrooms
turned into memorials.

No more childhoods
folded into public grief.

No more calendars
that mothers fear to turn.

I place them now
where no hand can reach.

Not in the ground only.
Not in the archive only.

Not in the chant only.

I place them in the keeping
of the Most Merciful.

I place them where morning
doesn't break.

I place them where no one
has to write their name
on a wrist
to be known.

I place them where the dust
is washed from their hair.

Where the torn page
is made whole.

Where the small shoe
finds its foot.

Where the bread is warm.
Where the water is clear.

Where no one asks them
to become symbols.

Where they are girls again.
Only girls.

Laughing.
Running.

Calling to one another
across a courtyard
that no violence can enter.

And here,
among the living,

I keep one prayer
between my teeth:

Let their memory stop the knife.
Let their innocence shame the cruel.

Let their martyrdom soften the hand
that wants to close.

Let their absence become not a banner
for revenge,
but a wall
against the next horror.

Let the guilty carry guilt.
And let the grieving carry names.

Let the world carry responsibility.
And let God carry the girls.

Because we could not.
Because we failed.

Because the room is empty now.

Because the mothers are still standing
at the door.

Because the unnamed day
isn't finished asking us
what kind of people
we will become
after seeing what was done.

Let us answer:
No more blood.

No more children.

No more horror
in the name of the dead.

Peace,
if peace can still find us.

Mercy,
if mercy can still bear our faces.

And for the girls,
light.

For the girls,
gardens.

For the girls,
a sky
that will never fall again.

The Machine Learns the Human

Opening Note: The Future Enters Wearing Yesterday's Mask

The future is not dangerous because it is new. It is dangerous because it keeps inheriting our oldest cowardices.

I do not believe every frightened voice that reaches me. Fear is a gifted tailor; it can dress rumor in the suit of revelation. It can make prejudice sound like pattern. It can turn one true wound into a thousand false enemies. I've seen this happen to occupied peoples. I've also watched it happen to wounded countries. I will not let grief become a factory for someone else's lie.

Still, I listen. Beneath the noise, there are real signals: languages dying in the mouth, empires privatizing the eye, money learning obedience, technology promising paradise while sharpening inequality, boys turned into doors for the wrong fire, migrants made into weather warnings, faith sold back to power, and old hatred returning with new fonts.

This chamber is not here to worship suspicion; it is here to purify it. To take panic out of the room and ask what body it has been eating from. To ask which fears are manufactured, which wounds are real, and which hands profit when the two are confused.

The machine is learning the human. So the human must remember the soul.

--

The Conspiracy Wants a Body

A conspiracy is sometimes
a wound looking for architecture.

It enters the room saying,
Look,
all the shadows connect.

And sometimes they do.

Sometimes the war was sold with false evidence.
Sometimes the law built to protect
was used to watch.
Sometimes the official story
came wearing shoes too clean
for the blood outside.

I know this.
Every occupied people knows
that truth often comes late
because power buys the clock.

But suspicion is a knife
that gets lonely.
If no one teaches it mercy,
it starts cutting faces
instead of ropes.

Soon an institution becomes a bloodline.
The neighbor becomes a plot.
The refugee becomes an assignment.
The mother tongue becomes a virus.
The child becomes evidence
for the fear already waiting.

I refuse this kind of knowing.

Give me proof with a conscience.
Give me pattern without bigotry.
Give me investigation
that doesn't need a scapegoat
to feel awake.

If the truth is real,
it can survive precision.

If the truth requires hatred
to keep breathing,
then it was not truth.
It was hunger
with a diagram.

--

The False Prophet of Patterns

The false prophet doesn't always carry scripture. Sometimes he carries screenshots. Sometimes he carries numbers. Sometimes he speaks in clipped videos, urgent captions, and the little theatre of certainty. He says, wake up, and often what he means is: inherit my enemy.

I have no quarrel with waking. I have lived too long under governments that preferred sleeping witnesses. But awakening without humility becomes another intoxication. A person can wake from one dream and immediately enter a worse one, especially if the second dream flatters the wound.

The false prophet starts with something true: a war built on lies, a surveillance law abused, a banker forgiven, a minister protected, an agency without shame. Then he turns. He gives the wound a tribe to blame. He gives the poor a foreign face to hate. He gives the lonely a secret order to fear. He gives the humiliated a crowd where cruelty feels like belonging.

I've seen this market. It sells fear as intelligence. It sells contempt as courage. It sells the oldest poisons in new bottles and calls them research.

So I ask every pattern three questions before I let it enter my house: Does it return the human face to the story? Does it name power precisely? Does it make mercy more possible? If not, I leave it outside with the other demons dressed as insight.

--

The Mother Tongue Is a Seed Vault

There is a word
your grandmother knows
that no school can translate.

A word for rain
before harvest.
A word for the silence
between two friends
who have already forgiven each other
but are still proud.

A word for the look a child gives
when grief enters the room
and the adults pretend
it is only weather.

Every language is a seed vault.
Inside it: weather, recipe, insult, prayer,
the way a people learned to survive
without writing everything down.

When a language dies,
it isn't only grammar
that leaves the earth.

A forest loses one name for shade.
A mother loses one word for worry.
A river loses the sound
it used to make in the mouth
of those who knew its turns.

Empire does not always burn books.
Sometimes it pays only the language
of the office.
Sometimes it teaches the child
that promotion starts
where grandmother ends.

But the old word waits.
Under the tongue.
Inside the lullaby.
In the joke that cannot cross borders
without losing one shoe.

I keep the word alive
by saying it badly,
then better,
then with my whole dead family
listening from the kitchen.

Song for the Last Word

Verse 1
don't bury the word
where the children can't find it.
don't sell the old rain
for a job with better lights.
there's a village in the vowel.
there's a field inside the phrase.
there's a grandmother calling
from the edge of vanished days.

Chorus
Keep one word alive for me.
Keep one door inside the name.
If the world forgets our speaking,
let the bread remember flame.
Keep one word alive for me.
Let the lost tongue bloom again.
A people isn't finished
while its children know
what the rain was called back then.

Verse II

They can close the school of memory.
They can laugh at how we sound.
They can make our mothers whisper
when the train is too crowded and loud.
But I heard the old word breathing
under every borrowed street,
and I followed it like water
back to those who planted me.

Final Chorus

Keep one word alive for me.
Let it cross the guarded line.
Let it sit beside the future
and refuse to be refined.
Keep one word alive for me.
Let the mouth become a seed.
What the empire calls forgotten,
may the children learn to read.

Yavne, or The Little School After Fire

After the great city fell, a teacher asked not for an army, not for a throne, not for revenge polished into law, but for a little place to keep learning alive. This is the part of history I trust: the exhausted scholar asking empire for a room where thought can breathe.

This is not a weapon against Jewish memory. It is a warning offered with reverence. A wounded people doesn't

honor its dead by borrowing the grammar of the empire that wounded it. Survival is holy. Domination is not survival. A book guarded by soldiers is not safer if it forgets the orphan at the gate.

Give me the little school after fire. Give me the room where children learn that memory is not a license. Give me the elder who says: we didn't survive one empire to become another empire's hand. Give me the courage to protect life without worshiping domination.

The book isn't safe because soldiers guard it; it's safe when it still teaches mercy to the one holding the gun.

--

The Faith That Cannot Be Bought

Empire is confused
by any faith
that will not kneel
at the register.

A person who fasts
is difficult to sell hunger to.
A person who prays
keeps interrupting the market.
A person who gives
before consuming
has already defected
from the religion of more.

This is why discipline frightens power.
Not because discipline is perfect.
Not because every believer is clean.
But because a soul trained to say no
becomes harder to purchase.

No to excess.
nor to intoxication.
No to the hunger
that eats another person's house.
No to money without mercy either.
No to pleasure that leaves someone else
less human.

I don't claim one path
for every soul.
God has more doors
than any preacher's key ring.

But I know this:
any religion that makes the poor visible
will be called dangerous
by those who profit
from invisible hunger.

The Private State Has a Server Room

Once, the empire needed a tower. Now it needs a
dashboard. Once, it needed informants behind curtains.
Now it needs a platform with clean branding,

procurement language, and a contract long enough to bury the verb.

The private state doesn't knock. It integrates. It harvests the passport, the welfare form, the license plate, the classroom attendance, the protest photo, the hospital appointment, the border crossing, the phone near the mosque, the name near the wrong keyword, the cousin near the wrong cousin.

Then it says efficiency. It says fraud prevention. It says national security. It says innovation. It says public-private partnership, which means the old coercion has learned to invoice.

I am not against tools. A tool can rescue the lost, translate the witness, organize medicine, map the missing, and keep a child alive through a message that crosses fire. But the same eye that finds the wounded can also select the target. The same system that connects the clinic can connect the cage.

So I ask the machine what every prophet should ask the king: whom do you serve, and who becomes smaller when you succeed?

Database Psalm

Blessed are the ones
not yet reduced
to risk score.

Blessed are the mothers
whose worry can't be scraped.
Blessed are the children
whose futures have not been predicted
by a contract signed
without their faces in the room.

Blessed are the workers
who still know how to look
at another human being
without querying a field.

O God of the unseen hand,
protect us from the seen eye
that calls itself neutral.

Let no algorithm
become a judge
without a conscience.
Let no dashboard
become a border
without a mother there
to ask what it has done
to her son.

If the future must count us,
let it count the bread we shared.
Let it count the wounds we refused to pass on.
Let it count the names
we learned to say whole.

--

Programmable Money

Money once had dirty hands.
That was almost honest.

It passed from market to pocket,
from worker to mother,
from auntie to nephew,
from neighbor to neighbor,
carrying sweat, fish, coffee, rent,
small debt, quiet mercy.

Now some dream of money
that obeys the master
before it reaches the poor.

Money that expires.
Money that knows your protest.
Money that refuses the wrong shop.
Money that punishes the wrong prayer.
Money that says you may eat
only where permission smiles.

A coin with a leash
is not progress.
It is a checkpoint
inside the wallet.

I want bread-money.
Bus-fare-money.
Medicine-money.
Grandmother-slips-it-into-your-hand-money.
Money humble enough

to leave no sermon
about why the hungry
should be optimized.

Let the future digitize mercy
if it must digitize anything.
Let no child be denied milk
because an invisible office
found his mother's grief
noncompliant.

--

AI Angel, AI Foreman

They speak of the coming intelligence as if a clean angel is descending through the wires. It will organize abundance, they say. It will cure inefficiency. It will make the old jobs disappear and deliver us into a garden the politicians were too corrupt to grow.

Maybe. I have no interest in pretending the future can't carry miracles. A machine can help a blind person read, a doctor diagnose, a farmer predict rain, a refugee translate a form, a witness preserve evidence before the state deletes it.

But I have seen every miracle meet a landlord. I have seen every tool become an owner when greed reaches it first. The factory didn't free the worker by existing. The internet did not free the lonely by glowing. The camera

did not save the child by witnessing. A tool is not salvation until it enters a moral economy.

What frightens me isn't the angel. It's the foreman hiding under its wings. High growth, empty hands. Abundance, but not for the replaced. Paradise, but only for those who make it to the gate after the layoffs, the wars, the quiet screens that decide who is useful.

If the machine can write, let it write eviction notices in reverse. If it can predict, let it predict hunger before the child sleeps without dinner. If it can optimize, let it optimize mercy. If it can replace labor, let the replaced inherit time, not shame.

Otherwise, don't call it intelligence. Call it appetite with better math.

--

The Future Has a Layoff Notice

Verse 1
The future knocks
with a badge made of glass.
It says your work was valuable
until it learned to pass.
It says the model is efficient.
It says the quarter sings.
It says there will be abundance
for the owners of the wings.

Chorus
Who eats in the garden
when the gardeners are gone?
Who sleeps under plenty
when the rent keeps walking on?
If the machine brings morning,
let it bring the worker too.
A dawn that leaves people behind
is only night
with a brighter blue.

Verse II
The teacher trains the program.
The program takes the class.
The driver maps the roadway.
The road forgets him fast.
The coder feeds the engine.
The engine learns his name.
Then the company says miracle
and hands him all the blame.

Bridge
I am not afraid of tools.
I am afraid of thrones.
I am afraid of progress
that doesn't know
who bleeds alone.

Final Chorus
Who eats in the garden

when the gardeners are gone?
Who blesses the table
if the hungry are withdrawn?
Let the machine serve mercy.
And let the surplus become bread.
Let no bright new heaven
be built
on the newly discarded dead.

--

The Border Panic Sermon

The panic preacher says the strangers are coming. He says they will erase you. He says they will not love your women, your customs, your God, your language, your softness, your future. He says wake up, and beneath the words I hear the old drum: become cruel before they do.

I won't lie. Migration can frighten a town. Change has weight. A neighborhood can feel its own name changing in the mouth. People can feel unheard, poor, mocked by elites who call every fear stupid while doing nothing to repair the conditions that made fear contagious.

But the panic preacher does not want repair. He wants a target. He does not ask why wages are low, why homes are unaffordable, why loneliness is industrial, why the clinic is full, why the schools are tired, why the rich need cheap labor but don't want the laborer's children at the birthday party. He points at the migrant because the migrant is visible and the owner is invited to dinner.

Do not hand your wounded country to a person who needs you afraid to feel useful. Ask the harder questions. Who broke the social contract? Who sold the houses? Who closed the factory? Who used the migrant as labor, then used the migrant as blame? Who made belonging so scarce that one more family at the border felt like theft?

The stranger didn't invent your emptiness. He arrived carrying his own.

--

The Old Lie Comes Back Wearing Scripture

The old lie knows many wardrobes.

Sometimes it wears race.
Sometimes it wears prophecy.
Sometimes it wears scholarship.
Sometimes it wears a verse
ripped from its river
and sharpened into a hook.

It says those people
are not who they say they are.
It says the synagogue is a shadow.
It says finance has a secret bloodline.
It says God needs you
to decide which children
are counterfeit.

No.

I have buried enough lies
to recognize one
when it comes
quoting heaven.

Jewish grief is real.
Muslim grief is real.
Christian grief is real.
The grief of the unbeliever is real.
No people is counterfeit
because hatred wants cleaner categories.

Name the army.
Name the policy.
Name the minister.
Name the contract.
Name the settlement.
Name the hunger.
Name the siege.
Name the actual institution
when it acts.

But don't invent
a hidden people
behind the machine.
That road has ovens behind it.
That road has no God at the end.

--

The Mineral Under the Prayer

There is always a mineral
under the prayer
when empire enters
with a hymn in its mouth.

Oil beneath democracy.
Tungsten beneath friendship.
Gold beneath development.
Cobalt beneath clean futures.
Ports beneath liberation.
Water beneath security.
A corridor beneath every speech
about values.

don't ask only
what the leader believes.
Ask what the land contains.
Ask who signed last month.
Ask who owns the company
that comes after the smoke.
Ask why the poor country
turns into strategically important
only when its ground
refuses to stay poor.

The mineral has no flag.
The child above it does.

that's why the child pays first.

--

The Verse at the End of the World

Every age believes it has been given the final number. The river stands. The hands lift. The sealed word trembles in the mouth of the prophet. How long? How long? How long?

I understand the hunger for a date. A calendar feels kinder than chaos. If the ending has a number, then suffering is not endless. If the book is sealed until the appointed hour, then maybe history is not simply people in expensive rooms making decisions the poor must survive.

But the last instruction given to the terrified soul is often not a schedule. It's a place. Stand where you are appointed. Rest when you must. Rise when it's time. Don't mistake ignorance for abandonment.

The world may end many times before it ends completely. A child loses a mother and one world ends. A language loses its last speaker and one world ends. A hospital loses power and one world ends. A people loses the right to bury its dead and one world ends.

So I don't wait for the final trumpet to become useful. I stand in my place now. I count bread. I count names. I count the living who still need water. If the end comes, let it find me refusing to become useless under the weight of prophecy.

--

The Kingdom Inside the Rib

They buried sayings
because a soul that knows itself
becomes difficult to rent.

A kingdom inside.
A kingdom outside.
A door in the chest
that no empire can checkpoint.

This does not mean
I abandon the world.
The hungry can't eat
my metaphor.
The prisoner cannot sleep
inside my enlightenment.

But I understand
why power fears
the awakened person.

A person who knows
the divine spark
inside the stranger
will not easily bomb him.
A person who knows
the divine spark
inside himself
will not easily kneel
to a false throne.

The kingdom is not escape.
It is responsibility
with roots in heaven
and hands in the sink.

Wash the bowl.
Feed the child.
Protect the name.
Then speak of hidden light.

Southern Wound, Silicon Crown

There are wounds in the southern end of the continent that the new century pretends are old weather. Land taken, bodies ranked, blood forbidden from crossing the color line even when life depended on it. A human being made less than human so another human being could survive the crime of feeling superior.

Don't tell me this ended because the signs came down. Systems don't die when embarrassed. They change industries. They become platforms, funds, rockets, borders, private islands, data empires, new philosophies about who deserves the future and who must be managed out of it.

The old colony learned to look at a body and see hierarchy. The new machine learns to look at a population and see optimization. The vocabulary changed. The wound didn't always receive the memo.

I am careful not to make a skin color into destiny. A child isn't born carrying the sins of a mine in his hands. But history has fingerprints. It leaves habits inside institutions. It teaches certain people to mistake distance for innocence and scale for God.

A future built by people who have not repented of dehumanization will digitize dehumanization and call it innovation.

Closing Hymn: Mercy Is the Operating System

Let the machine learn this first:

No child is a data point
before he is a body.
No mother is a variable
before she is a weather system
of love and fear.
No language is inefficient
because the market
has not yet found a way
to invoice its rain.

Let the future learn this second:

A people can't be optimized
out of hunger
while the table remains owned
by those who profit from empty plates.
A border cannot become intelligent

while it still asks the refugee
to prove the fire behind him
was hot enough.

Let the human learn this always:

Suspicion without mercy
becomes a factory.
Technology without justice
becomes a cage.
Prophecy without service
becomes entertainment.
Faith without the poor
becomes costume.
Language without memory
becomes a bright room
where nobody knows
why the grandmother is crying.

I choose the older system.
Bread.
Name.
Water.
Table.
Witness.
Song.
The hand reaching back
for the one who fell behind.

Call it primitive
if you need to.

The dead know better.
The children know better.
The future, if it wants to live,
will know better too.

Mercy is the operating system
that no empire
has been able
to uninstall.

Ashes: A Controlled Burn

PART I — BRUISE, LULLABY, HALLELUJAH

Bruise Me Blue

Came out red, born into the bruise
Sky cracked like a jawline / heavy with other people's dreams
My mother stitched my name into a linen ghost
so I wouldn't be forgotten when they swept us up like dust.

She told me, "Don't flinch when the moon turns orange."
We drink silence in the dark / choke on static lullabies
Heaven stopped writing us letters / so we made God out of shadows.

I used to know the word for joy. I think it started with a B.
Now I only taste copper and the hush of sirens
in my sleep.

I swear the earth remembers who it used to be; but me? I forget softer things.

—

Cardboard Hallelujah

Praise be to the mattress spring choir
Singin' bass notes through the floorboards

We baptize in buckets now
Rainwater + the last clean song

There was a girl who danced to static,
Kept a sparrow in a shoebox for hope.
We buried her with her fingers crossed
& a name no one dared to say.

They painted new borders
but forgot to teach us new names.

My uncle lost his leg to a sidewalk.
My cousin lost her voice to the wind.
Me? I keep losing days,
like loose teeth under a broken pillow.

We build holy things outta cardboard
and call it Hallelujah.

—

FLESH RADIO

Body buzzin' like a dial stuck between pain and memory
Hands hum frequencies I don't understand
but they sound like family.

They told me I was born from ashes

but I swear I remember the sea.

I learned how to pray through my soles; every step is a gospel when the world folds in.

You ever see a brother turn static?
Pixelate mid-laugh?
That's when I knew time was a liar.

Mama used to say,
"Even a moth knows when to leave the flame."
But we... we love the heat too much.

—

Little Wars

Got a war inside my cereal box,
Another one inside my skin.

They call them "operations,"
but I think of them as birthdays
because they always come loud, unexpected,
and end in crying.

We name streets after what we lost:
First Love Avenue,
Uncle's Elbow Road,

Don’t Look West Street.

Even the sun turns its back by noon.

I saw a boy write his will
on the inside of a matchbox.
Then light it.
Then smile.

That’s what they don’t teach you:
How beautiful it's
to burn with dignity.

–

Etymology of Dust

What is the root word of "refugee"?

Not safety. Not mercy. Not home.

It comes from "fugere" — to flee.
Which means the definition of me
is motion without arrival.

Even my tears evacuate early.

We sleep in grammar that doesn't conjugate to future tense.

I asked a man with no tongue,
"Where does it hurt?"
He pointed to the map / then tore it in half.

Even dust has lineage.
This is ours.

to blow
to cling
to return

—

Ghost Fruit

They dropped the sky in pieces
and called it a solution.

So we harvest ghost fruit now:
memories of mangoes / echoes of olive oil / fig tree phantoms

The children draw fire in crayon
and call it sunshine.

I kissed someone last spring
and she tasted like buried books.

We don't cry anymore, we bloom
in grief-shaped spirals.

Every night I whisper new names for myself:
None of them mean survivor.

But all of them mean this:
I was here.
I am still here.

—

—

PART II — RAGE IS A COUNTRY

RAGE IS A COUNTRY

--

Molotov Psalm

God's on the roof with a lighter; bible soaked in gasoline.
We sing our hallelujahs
with fists wrapped in denim and soot.

Blessed are the brick-throwers—
they still believe in architecture.
This ain't Sunday service.
This is scripture written in smoke.
And the only amen you'll hear
is the sound of a cop car coughing flame.

--

Eat the Rich, Then Pay the Bill

We dined on gold-plated silence.
Chewed through their hedge fund bones.
The menu read:
Appetizer—Eviction Notice
Entrée—Sweatshop Soup
Dessert—Debt
And they still charged us extra
for not tipping the oligarchs.
Fine.
We'll pay in riots.

--

Barricades Don't Have Pause Buttons

You don't stop a revolution
for a cigarette break.
You don't mute the sirens
because the baby's sleeping.
We built these barricades
from grandma's coffins
and textbooks full of lies.
You want peace?
You build it yourself—
with your hands.
Not with tweets.

--

I Want to Riot Where It Hurts

Not in headlines.
Not in windowpanes.
But in the policy that broke my uncle; in the amendment
that forgets my skin.
I want to riot in the ballot box,
in the zoning laws,
in the anthem.
I want to set fire to the silence
that comes after
"Let us pray."

--

Bulletproof Grammar

They shot my language in the throat
and called it a typo.
Censored my poem
and called it peacekeeping.
But my grammar wears Kevlar now.
My syntax bleeds on the page.
And every comma
is a protest
interrupting the sentence
they tried to finish for me.

--

Zombie Has a Government Job Now

Marches like a press secretary; smiles like a war criminal.
Files paperwork in triplicate
for every death it causes.
Still mutters:
"Yes, boss."
Still drools on the Constitution.
Still salutes
with a boot.

--

The Guillotine Needs Maintenance

It squeaks now—
from disuse,
from fear.
It remembers glory days
when kings rolled
and crowds sang.
Now it rusts
beneath museums and metaphors.
But sharpen it.
Oil it.
Whisper into its wooden dreams.
It'll remember.

--

Free Speech Costs Extra

The license to protest
now comes with a processing fee.
Chant louder?
That's taxable.

Sing on the corner?
Noise violation.
Your freedom of speech
is subject to availability.
Please read the terms & conditions
before opening your mouth.

--

THE GROOVE UNDER SURVEILLANCE

--

Funk Is a Felony in 5 Countries

They outlawed the bassline; said it moved hips too freely.
Said syncopation was subversion.
In my city, they cuffed a saxophonist
for seducing the streetlight.
In yours, they jailed a DJ
for remixing the president's lies.
Freedom sounds like a breakbeat now—
and they hate it.

--

Gas Mask Serenade

She played cello in the riot line—
bow wrapped in gauze,
face kissed by tear gas.

EVERY NOTE CLIMBED THE SHIELD WALL
and kicked boredom in the teeth.
We danced like evacuation drills,
sang like evacuation orders.
Somewhere, the conductor weeps
behind bulletproof glass.

--

THE PRESIDENT'S IPOD ONLY PLAYS JAZZ

Smooth. Predictable.
No room for rage,
just solos that spiral
but never erupt.
He sips brandy to Coltrane
while drones circle
like moths.
He says he likes "soulful things."
Then signs the order
to empty another neighborhood.

--

Dancing While Disappearing

My cousin vanished mid-verse.
They said it was visa issues.
Said it was "necessary."
But I heard his heartbeat
in the speaker's hum.
Felt his ghost two-step
through every censored lyric.
We still dance.
Because memory got rhythm.

--

Telegrams to the Oilfields

Dear Minister:
We spilled another mother today—
her son drank runoff from the refinery; we wrapped her name in pipeline tape.
Buried her behind the shed.
Please advise.
PS: Send more flags.

--

Rhythm for the Rationed

The beat comes weekly,
two minutes per ear.
You get more if you're clean,
if you smile in the checkpoints.
We barter for verses
like bread.
One girl sold her chorus
for soap.
She sings with silence now.

--

They Censored My Bassline

I played it low.
They played it lower.
I looped truth in four bars; they looped doubt in ten.
Then they redacted the drop; erased the groove.
Said my kick drum was treason.
But listen—
my hi-hat still taps
like resistance.

--

Babylon Has a Dancefloor

It pulses under embassies,
winks in boardrooms,
twirls in the room where they count the votes.
You thought the club was freedom?
That beat is algorithmic.
That hook is funded.
But still we wind our hips—
because sometimes,
even prisoners
need rhythm.

--

THE JAILHOUSE PROPHET

--

CONCRETE LULLABY

I sleep to the hum of locks,
to the drip of pipes that forgot how to weep.
A rat shares my pillow.
My dreams are rationed.
They told me bedtime stories about justice.
Then turned off the lights
and locked the moon outside.

--

Every Warden Cries in His Sleep

He walks like a man with no mirror.
Feeds us guilt at 6 a.m.
But his fingers tremble
when he touches the cell keys.
He knows the system eats its builders too.
He once had a brother
on this side of the bars.

--

The Guns Can't Read This Poem

I taped it to the wall; wrote it in code.
In hunger.
In toothmarks.
The guards searched my bunk,
but they can't decode breath.
They can't silence rhythm
written in heartbeat.

--

Johnny Sang Truth in Chains

They gave him a mic
and thought they'd owned him.

But his chords bled gospel
into the cracks of their silence.
Even the steel sang along.
Even the walls
tapped their feet.

--

Mama, They Tattooed a Barcode on My Soul

It beeps when I dream; scans when I smile.
The priest says I'm still worthy.
But the scanner disagrees.
My prayer now starts:
"Please don't erase me."
And ends:
"Am I still a name,
or just a SKU?"

--

Cigarettes for the Guilty, Bibles for the Broken

We trade verses for vices.
Genesis wrapped in rolling paper.
There's a preacher in Cell 9
who baptizes with spit

and sings in Morse; he said Jesus did time too.
Said we're all prophets
if we cry loud enough.

--

I Forgive, But My Ink Remembers

Each tattoo a sentence; each sentence a story.
They branded my story
and called it history.
I forgave the judge.
But my knuckles still spell "Resist."
Even when folded in prayer.

--

No One Escapes the Chorus

You can't cuff a melody.
Can't isolate a harmony.
We hum through walls.
Tap rhythms into rust; they said the yard was closed.
We opened our mouths
and made sky.

--

Womb of the Revolution

BLOOD IN THE MILK

--

The Midwives Were Missing

When I came into this world,
there was no one to catch me.
Only concrete,
and a guard with clean gloves.
They said: Push quietly; said: Pain is evidence.
I bit down on my own name
so it wouldn't be taken.

My first lullaby
was a siren in B minor.

--

Anthem for the Unborn Girl

They already made a law for her skin.
Already priced her hymen.
She hasn't wept yet,
but they drafted a curriculum
to keep her obedient.
I sing to her anyway.
A song without cage; A name without nation.
An anthem
with no flag to betray her.

--

I Gave Birth in a Detention Center

Barbed wire cut my water open.
The guards watched.
Said, "Don't bleed on the floor."
My child came out crying
in three languages.
None of them welcome; they wrapped him in plastic.

Said, “He’s evidence now.”
I named him Freedom.
They misspelled it on the form.

--

God Was a Doula Once

She kneeled beside Eve,
caught her first child in both hands,
smeared blood on her cheeks like warpaint.
God moaned when the pain hit.
Held her breath during crowning.
Said: “You are holy
not because you pray—
but because you push.”

--

The First Language Was a Moan

Before borders,
before flags,
before shame—
we spoke in ache.
In opening.

In breath cut short by rapture.
A mother moaned the first word,
and it echoed through pelvises
until someone called it love.

--

My Body Is Not a Border

You can't patrol my hips.
Can't scan my nipples for weapons.
My thighs aren't checkpoints; my spine doesn't require visa.
Every time you draw a line,
I curve.
Every time you wall me in,
I bleed through the bricks.

--

The Revolution Has Breasts

They leak truth at midnight; feed protest through cracked nipples.
They are sagging,
sacred,

battle-worn.
Don't mistake softness for surrender.
We've fed armies
with these.

--

Her Womb Was a War Zone

The ultrasound said girl.
The government said target.
They draped her belly in flags
and called it national duty; but each kick felt like a siren.
Each cramp, a curfew.
She labored under lockdown.
The midwife whispered,
"She's coming out angry."

--

Crying Is a Weapon They Never Catalogued

When she wept at the checkpoint,
the soldier turned away.
When she sobbed during sentencing,
the judge fumbled his pen.
They call it weakness—

but it bends bullets,
cracks silence,
writes poetry in rooms where poetry is banned.

--

RAGE IN THE VEIL

--

I Braided My Rage into a Weapon

They searched my bag
but not my hair.
Didn't know I carry fire
in scalp-tight spirals.
My braid swings like a sermon.
Every twist a manifesto.
Touch it—
and feel what rebellion feels like
at the root.

--

Don't Call Me Queen—I'm a Siren

I don't want your crown; I want your confession.
I want you kneeling

before the ache you caused.
Queens rule kingdoms.
Sires inherit blood.
But sirens?
We drown empires
with lullabies.

--

Virginity Is a Colonizer's Invention

They named my body
after the land they couldn't enter.
Staked flags in metaphors; claimed absence as purity.
My hips aren't haunted.
They're home.
And I don't need to be empty
to be holy.

--

They Burned My Clothes, I Burned Their Flags

They said I wore sin; said my skirt summoned storms.
So I stripped; danced naked under surveillance.
Lit a match
and torched every stitch

they stitched shame into.
Now the flag curls in ash
and I still got hips that swing.

--

Song for the Child Bride Who Sang Anyway

They stole her name
before she could spell it.
Clipped her future
with wedding rings.
But she hummed freedom
under her veil.

Every note a map.
Every chorus
a crack in the cage.

--

Instructions for Becoming Fire

Step 1: Remember your grandmother's scream.
Step 2: Boil your silence.
Step 3: Add kerosene; step 4: Light the poem.
Step 5: Walk into Parliament
wearing only truth.

Step 6: Burn.

--

I Want to Be Loved Like an Uprising

Don't romance me with roses—
bring torches.
Kiss me with conviction.
Touch me like a siren
just rang out.
I want to be held
like a banner.
Shouted
like a slogan.
Fought for.

--

When the Dress Said No

It wasn't tight.
It wasn't short.
It was stitched with refusal.
It clung to ribs
like a second scream.
And when they pulled it off—

the fabric wept.
But the girl
didn't.

--

What the Goddesses Whispered to Me at Midnight

They said:
You're not broken—
you're blooming.
Your rage is sacred.
Your thighs hold thunder.
They tried to shame you
into silence.
Instead,
you became a song
they can't stop humming
in courtrooms.

--

WITNESS IN THE ASH

--

The Bullet That Killed Her Was Made of Law

It wore a badge.
Wrote a warrant.
Came wrapped in paperwork
and parliamentary grammar.
But it pierced just the same.
Her blood spelled "red tape"
across the pavement.
Still, no one read it.

--

We Buried Her Name in the River

The soil was too corrupt.
The sky, too watched.
So we whispered her name to the current—
let it carry truth downstream
to daughters not yet born.
If you ever hear singing
beneath the bridges,
that's her.

--

I Saw the Police Laugh at the Corpse

The chalk hadn't dried.
The family hadn't arrived.

But the joke landed anyway.
They laughed like uniforms were armor
for the soul.
I laughed too—
quietly.
So they wouldn't make space
for another outline.

--

Poem Written While Bleeding in the Backseat

My blood spelled a verse
the ambulance refused to hear.
The driver asked for silence.
But my breath came in rhyme.
I thought if I could make this moment a lyric,
maybe I wouldn't die
as a footnote.

--

She Had No Tomb, So We Made Her One of Song

We built no statue.
They would've torn it down.
Instead, we sang her name

in subway tunnels,
graffitied it into lullabies,
wrote it in the margins of passports
until the world remembered
she was more
than headline.

--

My Sister's Blood Stains the National Anthem

You still sing it.
Still clap.
But you don't taste iron
in the vowels.
Don't hear her sob
between the verses.
I stand
because I'm haunted.
You stand
because you don't know.

--

I Testified with My Bones

They asked for evidence.
I pointed to the fracture
that never healed.
To the silence
between two broken ribs.
To the ache
I renamed as proof.
My bones spoke clearer
than any affidavit.

--

They Called Her a Witch Because She Remembered

She held history
like it was a wound that never clotted.
Named the generals; quoted the lies.
And when truth caught flame
in her throat,
they tied her to the stake—
called it justice.

--

There Are No Martyrs, Only Mothers Without Daughters

They light candles.
Frame photos.
Build shrines in silence; but martyrs don't bleed alone.
Every bullet
leaves a mother screaming
in a language too holy
for hashtags.

--

RAPTURE IN THE

--

I Don't Want Justice—I Want Her Back

You bring your handshakes,
your polished apologies.
Your reforms.
Your slogans.
But I want her laughter; her shoes in the hallway.
Her humming through burnt rice.
Keep your justice.
It's too late.

--

The New World Will Be Delivered in Screams

Not speeches.
Not resolutions.
But shrieks from crowning wombs
and broken barricades.
The midwives wear gas masks.
The prophets carry shields.
Every scream
writes a scripture
on the cracked walls of empire.

--

We Teach the Children to Sing in Sirens

Lullabies shaped like warnings; melodies measured in decibels.
They don't fear thunder—
it's the silence that hurts.
They clap in rhythm
with riot boots.
Hum through border fences.
Sing without asking
permission.

--

I Danced in the Rubble of His Empire

Wore nothing but dust and defiance.
He built skyscrapers on my back; now they're ash.
And I move like forgiveness
never asked for.
I twirled
on the grave of a statue
they thought immortal.

--

Love Is the Loudest Form of Defiance

Not roses.
But revolution held in hand.
Not hearts.
But shelter.
Love that feeds.
That stitches wounds.
That stays when the power cuts out.
I loved someone once
so loudly
they outlawed the echo.

--

My Tears Are Currency in Heaven

Spent every drop
on prayers that went unanswered.
But in the next world,
I'll be rich.
I'll own oceans.
I'll flood borders.
And my tears will baptize
what you called
a mistake.

--

When They Apologize, Spit Petals

Smile.
Whisper, "Too late."
Then bloom.
Turn your trauma
into trumpet flowers.
Grow vines
through courtrooms.
When they say "We didn't know,"
make the garden louder
than the excuse.

--

No More Eulogies—Only Earthquakes

We've buried too many songs.
Too many girls renamed "tragedy."
Now we shake.
Now we rupture.
Now our grief
knocks buildings down.
No more poems for coffins.
Only tremors
for tomorrow.

--

The Revolution Was Always a Woman Giving Birth Alone

No cameras.
No flags.
Just sweat,
blood,
and silence.
She screamed—
not for help,
but for history to listen.

And when the child came out
with a fist in the air,
the stars bowed.

We Will Not Go Silent

Protest Chants

Opening Note

These chants are built for bodies in public: feet on pavement, hands holding signs, voices tired but still rising.

They are meant to be repeated, shortened, stretched, sung, whispered, or shouted. Some are call-and-response. Some are vigil prayers. Some are street lyrics. Some are small sermons that can be broken into chants.

They refuse collective accusation. They refuse hatred. They condemn occupation, genocide, greed, erasure, militarism, propaganda, and the machinery that makes a child disappear into a number.

Use them with discipline. Use them with love. Use them with witness. Let the chant become a lamp, not a match thrown at another human being.

--

--

Systems Have Signatures

No race is guilty.
No faith is to blame.
Systems have signatures.
Crimes have names.

--

Not Against a People

Not against a people.
Not against a prayer.
Against the boot.
Against the air
turned into fire.

--

The Line We Hold

We hold the line.
We hold it clean.

No hate in the chant.
No blood in the dream.

--

Say Their Names

Not numbers.
Not dust either.
Not data.
Not cost.
Say their names.
Nothing human is lost.

--

Bread, Not Bombs

Bread, not bombs.
Water, not walls.
Open the road.
Answer the calls.

--

Water Has Rights

Water has rights.
Bread has a face.
Do not make thirst
a policy of place.

--

People Are Not States

People aren't states.
People are not kings.
People are mothers
with laundry on strings.

--

Do Not Say Clash

Do not say clash
when one side has sky.
Do not say conflict
when children die.

--

No Passive Voice

No passive voice.
No fog in the claim.
A house was not hit.
Someone gave the aim.

--

Prayer Before the March

God of the wounded,
walk with our feet.
Keep our anger honest.
Keep our mercy sweet.

--

Prayer for the Dead

Receive the dead
whose names were made small.
Make heaven a country
with room for them all.

--

Prayer for the Living

Protect the living.
Feed the weak.

Give the silent
strength to speak.

--

Song: Name the Hand

Verse
I will not curse a bloodline.
I will not curse a name.
I curse the room where power
learned to profit from flame.

Chorus
Name the hand that ordered.
Name the written line.
Systems made the wound.
People carry life.

Bridge
Bring the child forward.
Bring the mother near.
Let the world look closely
at what it refused to hear.

--

The Last Chant

When the war ends,
we will not end.
We will plant mint.
We will call friend.

--

Go Home With the Flame

Go home with the flame.
Do not let it become hate.
Let it cook soup.
Let it open the gate.

--

Closing Note for the Crowd

If your voice is tired, let someone else carry the line; if your anger is hot, let mercy hold the handle.

If someone tries to turn the chant into hatred, stop the chant and begin again.

A protest isn't only a shout. It is a rehearsal for the world we claim to want.

No child is disposable. No system is too large to be named. Power leaves signatures.

The people will not go silent.

The American Fall

A NOTE BEFORE THE FALL

This is not a poem against a people.
This is not a sermon against ordinary lives.
This is not a desire to see ordinary families lose their

roofs, their medicines, their schools, their sons, their daughters, their small fenced peace.

I know what collapse does.
I've seen the house after the powerful finish making history with other people's bones.

So let this be clear:
I don't celebrate ruin.
I do not pray for famine.
I do not ask God to punish children for the sins of men in marble rooms.

I am writing about a pattern.
I am writing about what happens when a republic starts to confuse appetite with destiny.
I am writing about roads that become troop routes, money that becomes scripture, flags that become blindfolds, screens that become amphitheaters, prisons that become industries, and leaders who learn to speak like saviors while feeding the machine beneath the altar.

Rome isn't the past.
Rome is a habit.
Rome is what happens when power forgets the poor can still hear it laughing.

America isn't finished because a poet says so.
America is endangered when it stops listening to the prophets it buries in debt, hunger, exile, and song.

--

Every republic carries a little crown hidden under the floorboards.

--

The Senate Has a Sponsor

prose

The old senators wore white. The new ones wear television makeup.

The old senators spoke for estates. The new ones speak for donors, platforms, defense contracts, hedge funds, pharmaceutical weather, private prisons, and the small invisible gods who live in quarterly reports.

A republic doesn't die because debate becomes loud. It dies when debate becomes theatre and theatre becomes law.

I've seen men defend freedom with a lobbyist's hand in their pocket. I have seen women campaign on mercy and vote for cages because mercy had no political action committee. I have seen a chamber full of polished shoes discuss hunger as if hunger were a theory written by the poor to embarrass breakfast.

The empire does not need every senator to be corrupt. It needs enough decent ones to remain procedural while the thieves carry the furniture out.

When Rome began to fall, it did not announce: I am falling.
It held hearings.

--

The amphitheater didn't vanish. It learned to fit in the hand.

--

Amphitheater App

POEM

The circus is smaller now.
It fits in the hand.

No lions are needed.
We tear each other apart
with comments.

No emperor raises a thumb.
The algorithm does it
without a face.

It knows the old hunger:
show me blood
that doesn't touch my floor.
show me shame
that is not mine.

show me a stranger falling
so I may call my sitting wisdom.

Rome built stone rings
for the appetite of the crowd.
America built glass rectangles
and taught the crowd
to become the ring.

Every swipe is a cheer.
Every outrage,
a ticket.
Every corpse,
a clip before dinner.

And when the soul grows tired
of watching the world burn,
the machine whispers:
there is more fire
where that came from.

--

When money becomes God, every temple becomes a cash register.

--

The Eviction Notice Reads Like Scripture

prose poem

There are documents in America more feared than thunder.
One comes in the mailbox and the whole apartment changes temperature.

The table becomes an altar of panic. The child lowers his voice without being told. The mother reads the date twice. The father goes quiet in the way men go quiet when they are measuring the distance between dignity and the street.

In Rome, the land gathered in the hands of the few until the small farmers became memories. In the new empire, the house gathers itself away from the people who sleep inside it.

A roof becomes an investment vehicle.
A neighborhood becomes a portfolio.
A city becomes a mouth that eats its nurses, teachers, cooks, drivers, widows, and sons.

The notice says vacate; the soul hears: vanish.

--

Greed Has Excellent Manners

poem

Greed doesn't always shout.

Often it smiles,
wears a navy suit,
uses phrases like efficiency,
optimization,
shareholder value,
necessary adjustment.

Greed doesn't say
I took the bread.

Greed says
the bread was underperforming.

Greed doesn't say
I poisoned the river.

Greed says
regulatory uncertainty.

Greed does not say
I bought the judge.

Greed says
independent expenditure.

Greed does not say
I own the senator.

Greed says
access.

And the people,
trained to respect polished things,
wait for the crime
to arrive with dirty hands.

By then the house is gone.
By then the river is burning.
By then the children know
that some thieves
are too clean
to be arrested.

--

A wall is a confession built from stone.

--

The Border Is a Mirror

poem

The border is not a line.
It is a mirror
where the empire sees
what it did elsewhere
walking back toward it.

A farm emptied by trade.
A village frightened by guns.
A climate made stranger
by appetites in distant cities.
A child carrying water
through a country

that once carried soldiers
through his grandfather's sky.

Then the empire says:
Why are you here?

As if history doesn't remember
who knocked first.

I have seen men hate the migrant
because hating the cause
would require reading.

I've seen women blame the stranger
because blaming the landlord
would require courage.

I've seen leaders
feed fear to the hungry
and call the meal patriotism.

The border doesn't protect the soul.
It only reveals
what the soul has been taught
to fear.

--

New Barbarians

PROSE

Rome called them barbarians because it could not hear their languages as languages; every ministry of conquest has a word for people it has wounded into motion.

Invader.
Illegal.
Threat.
Flood.
Caravan.
Swarm.

Notice how power loves water metaphors when speaking of the poor. A flood has no face. A wave has no mother. A tide has no paperwork, no lullaby, no childhood photograph folded in a sock.

But I have met the so-called barbarian.
He is tired.
She is carrying diapers.
They are not coming to destroy civilization.
They are looking for the civilization whose commercials reached them before its conscience did.

The true barbarian is not the hungry stranger at the gate.

The true barbarian is the empire that can afford to feed him and chooses spectacle instead.

--

Every empire says its soldiers are defending peace
somewhere peace keeps dying.

--

Contractors At The Temple

POEM

The temple has contractors now.
They sell helmets,
software,
private guards,
intelligence,
consulting,
reconstruction plans
for cities their invoices helped ruin.
First the bomb.
Then the bid.
First the fire.
Then the contract.
First the orphan.
Then the panel discussion.
This is the genius of late empire:
it profits from the wound,
then charges for the bandage.

I've seen the men
who call this strategy.
Their hands are soft.
Their language is clean.
Their maps have no smell.

They don't hear the rubble
clearing its throat.
They don't know
that every unpaid scream
becomes an ancestor.

--

No skin carries the system. Systems are built by hands
and can be unbuilt by hands.

--

No Skin Is The Empire

POEM

No skin is the empire; say it until the room stops lying.

No child is born
with a colony in the fist.
No baby arrives
owning a plantation,
a prison,
a border patrol,

a redlined map,
a school district shaped like a wound.

But systems know
how to hide inside innocence.
They dress themselves
as custom,
policy,
heritage,
market,
preference,
common sense.

Then they ask the living
to defend what the dead built
because repair feels like accusation.

I refuse that trap.

I won't curse a people
for the machinery
that trained them poorly.
I will not absolve a people
when the machinery still runs
through their comfort.

No people is the machinery.
No wound is imaginary.
No healing is possible
without truth
taking off its shoes
and entering the house.

--

When worship becomes spectacle, the soul forgets how to sit in silence.

--

Beware the man who says only he can save the people from one another.

--

False Prophet With A Teleprompter

satire-sermon

Beloved,
be careful.
Not every man with a Bible
has met God.
Not every woman with a flag
has met the country.

Not every mouth saying freedom
would recognize a free person
walking toward it.

The false prophet
has learned modern lighting.
He knows camera angles.
He knows the phrases
that make the frightened feel chosen.

He can quote scripture
without feeding the hungry.
He can praise family
while separating families.
He can praise life
while making life unlivable
for the born.

Do not ask
how loudly he prays.
Ask who benefits
when he finishes.

--

The Provinces Burn Differently

--

Collapse does not arrive everywhere at once. It practices first on the ignored.

--

Rural Hymn With Closed Pharmacy

LYRIC

Verse I
The pharmacy closed and the church still rings,
the diner remembers forgotten things.
A boy throws stones at a rusted sign,
his mother says, baby, this town was mine.

Chorus
Do not laugh at the empty street.
Do not mock the tired wheat.
Do not call the broken dumb.
This is where the fall first comes.

Verse II
The factory whistle is ten years dead,
the high school trophy has lost its red.
A flag keeps snapping above the store,
but pride can't pay for a doctor no more.

Bridge
Someone will come with a match and a speech,
blaming the strangers the town cannot reach.
God, send a neighbor before that man
turns grief into a burning plan.

--

City Of Tents

POEM

The tents appear
like questions
under the freeway.

Each one says:
what is a country?

Is it the skyline?
The market?
The flag?
The anthem?
The police cruiser
circling the people
with nowhere else to sleep?

A city of billionaires
steps over nylon homes
and calls itself innovation.

I've seen Rome
in the shadow of glass towers.
I have seen aqueducts
become apps.
I've also seen empire
measure progress
by the height of buildings
instead of the number of people
who can rest beneath them.

--

The Fall Is Not An Explosion

--

Most collapses arrive quietly, disguised as normal.

--

A prayer isn't surrender. Sometimes it is the first honest public speech.

--

Prayer For A Republic That Still Has Breath

PRAYER

God of nations and nameless people,
God of the capital and the county road,
God of the flag and the child frightened by it,
hear me.

Do not let this country become
only a lesson in future textbooks.
Do not let its rivers become footnotes.
Do not let its poor become statistics

recited by comfortable scholars
who never learned their names.

Break the spell of spectacle.
Break the worship of wealth.
Break the addiction to enemies.
Break the lie that cruelty is strength.
Break the market's hand
when it reaches for the soul.

Leave us enough humility
to repair what pride has ruined.
Leave us enough memory
to recognize the pattern.
Leave us enough joy
to refuse despair.

If the eagle must descend,
let it land gently
in the hands of the people.

--

Prayer For The Worker

PRAYER

Bless the worker
whose back is older than his face.
Bless the woman
who cleans the office
where men decide her wage.

Bless the driver
who brings the meal
he can't afford to order.
Bless the nurse
who holds the dying
then clocks out into debt.
Bless the teacher
who learns each child's fear
and still says good morning.
Bless the farmer,
the janitor,
the cashier,
the warehouse body,
the mechanic,
the cook,
the caregiver,
the one whose name
never appears
in the speech about prosperity.
Let the country remember:
no empire stands
without hands it refuses to honor.

--

Prayer Against The Strongman

PRAYER

God,
protect us from the man
who says he alone can save us.
Protect us from the woman
who turns mercy into weakness.
Protect us from the party
that demands our conscience
as membership fee.
Protect us from the preacher
who blesses domination
and calls it order.
Protect us from the crowd
inside ourselves
that wants a king
because democracy is tiring.
Teach us to love freedom
not as appetite,
but as responsibility.
Teach us to love truth
not as a weapon,
but as bread.
Teach us to love country
without making an idol
of its shadow.

--

--

Small Joy During Decline

poem

A boy laughs
beside a broken hydrant.

There,
the empire fails
for one second.

A grandmother grows tomatoes
in a bucket
outside a building
that should have been repaired
twelve winters ago.

There,
the empire fails again.

Two strangers push a stalled car
through rain.
A teacher stays late.
A nurse sings softly.
A father braids his daughter's hair
before a shift
that will steal his evening.

Do you see it?

The fall is loud,
but life is stubborn
in a quieter register.
Every unprofitable kindness
is a crack
in the empire's theology.

--

The Republic Of The Table

PROSE POEM

I no longer trust any politics that cannot imagine a table.
A table where the worker sits beside the scholar.
A table where the migrant speaks without performing gratitude.
A table where the veteran is not used as decoration.
A table where the descendants of the wounded are not asked to make everyone comfortable before telling the truth.
A table where the rich don't arrive as saviors but as citizens under judgment.
A table where the child eats first.
Rome had banquets while provinces starved.
America must choose whether its table is a republic or a throne.

--

How To Leave The Empire Without Leaving The People

I don't know if America will fall.

I know empires always believe they are exceptions.
I know roads remember armies.
I know coins remember hunger.
I know crowds can be trained to love cruelty if cruelty is lit correctly.
I know republics can become costumes worn by money.
I know flags can cover wounds without healing them.
I know Rome didn't vanish. It became a warning with many descendants.

But I also know this:
people are not empires.

The mother isn't the Pentagon.
The child is not the prison contract.
The worker is not the stock market.
The farmer is not the lobbyist.
The nurse is not the empire's foreign policy.
The teacher is not the billionaire's dream.
The veteran is not the speech that used him.
The migrant is not the fear sold about him.

The poor are not the failure of the nation.
They are the nation telling the truth about itself.

To leave the empire
is not to abandon the people.

It is to love them enough
to stop worshiping the machine
that eats them.

So I close this book
not with a curse,
but with a task:
repair the roof,
feed the child,
free the river,
forgive the debt,
welcome the stranger,
disarm the lie,
read the banned memory,
watch the strongman carefully,
make no people carry power's crimes,
make no poverty invisible,
make no war holy,
make no market God.

If the fall comes,
let it be the fall of arrogance,
not the fall of the people.

Let the empire descend.
And let the neighbor rise.

MOVEMENT IV

BEFORE THE FIRST HUMAN

The First Human

A Concise Spiritual History

A NOTE BEFORE BREATH

I am not writing to prove which altar is oldest. I remember seeing men dig beneath another man's prayer, find an older stone, and call that discovery victory. I am not writing victory. I am writing recurrence.

Across deserts, deltas, forests, islands, mountains, and cities, human beings keep telling one story: we are earth and more than earth; we wake inside mystery; we wound one another; we build towers; we drown; we begin again;

we receive law; we break law; we seek mercy; we fear the end; we hope the end isn't only an ending.

Every religion gives the story different garments. One wraps it in clay. Another in lotus. Another in desert fire. Another in a tree. Another in the silence behind the breath. The characters change. The ache stays.

So I will write to the shapes beneath the names. The first human. The second face. The brother. The boat. The mother. The teacher. The table. Not history as the academy holds it, not doctrine as the pulpit guards it. A spiritual manuscript of pattern, grief, mercy, and return.

BOOK I - CLAY AND BREATH

—

1. The First Story

Before temple, hunger.

Before doctrine, thunder.

Before scripture, a mother with one hand on a fevered forehead, bargaining with the dark.

The first story had no border, so it had no religion yet. It moved from mouth to mouth with smoke in its hair. It slept in caves. It crossed rivers inside migrants. It learned new names wherever people learned new grief.

One people said we came from clay. Another said sound. Another said a cosmic body broke and became worlds.

Another said we are sparks remembering a light older than birth.

I don't laugh at any of them.
A human being is exactly that impossible:
mud with memory,
hunger with music,
animal with prayer.

2. Clay

The old story begins with earth because earth is honest.

Clay doesn't pretend to be clean. It carries root, worm, rain, ash, bone, seed, hoofprint, forgotten blood. It has held the dead and fed the living. When the first human is shaped from clay, the story isn't saying we are low. It's saying we belong to everything that has ever broken down and become food for tomorrow.

The body isn't a mistake; it's the sacred thing that gets tired. It's the temple that sweats. The mosque of ribs. The church of lungs. The synagogue of pulse. The shrine of hunger.

If the Divine wanted only angels, there would be no bread, no kneecaps, no mothers rinsing lentils, no graves where wildflowers make theology without permission.

Clay isn't the opposite of spirit.
Clay is spirit learning weight.

3. Breath

Then came breath.

Not decoration, not weather passing through an animal. Breath was the invisible signature placed inside the visible shape. The body became a flute and something unseen tried its first note.

When I breathe, I don't feel ownership. I feel borrowing. Air comes to me from trees, oceans, the mouths of the dead, and children not yet born. I take it in, warm it with my trouble, and return it changed.

This is the first covenant.
No one signs it.
Everyone keeps it until they can't.

Prayer starts here, before language. A baby crying is already a theologian. For now, A dying man exhaling is already returning a book to its shelf.

4. Garden and Fruit

Every people remembers a garden it can't enter anymore.

Some call it paradise. Some call it childhood. Some call it the village before the soldiers. Some call it the house before illness. Some call it the face of the beloved before betrayal taught the eyes caution.

The garden isn't only a place at the beginning of the world. It is the memory of unbroken trust.

And the fruit was not just fruit. No sacred story wastes a tree. The fruit was knowledge with skin on it. Appetite given color. The hand reaching before the soul was ready to bless what it touched.

I am not against knowledge. A people without knowledge turns into livestock for priests, kings, merchants, and machines. But there's a knowing that ripens you, and a knowing that makes you clever enough to destroy the house while explaining architecture.

Since then, every library is also an orchard.
Every screen is also a tree.
Every question asks:
will this make me more merciful,
or only more armed?

—

5. Two Brothers

The first religion after the garden was comparison.

Two brothers stood before the unseen with their hands full. One brought labor. One brought blood. Or maybe both brought what they knew how to bring. The story changes from tongue to tongue, but envy keeps the same face.

The offering is never only the offering. It carries the heart like a hidden flame. The Divine does not need fruit, grain,

smoke, coin, or animal. The Divine wants the part of us we keep disguising as devotion.

A brother looked at a brother and saw accusation instead of kin.

That is where murder starts.
Not when the hand lifts the weapon,
but when the face before us stops being family.

6. The Field

The first blood did not fall in a palace.
It fell in a field.

That matters. The field was innocent. It had been teaching seed how to split open and become food. Then the human brought it a new lesson: how to drink a brother.

Every war repeats this scene with better instruments. Every genocide begins when one body decides another body is an obstacle in sacred clothing. Every nation that kills its own children tells itself an offering is being made.

The ground has never accepted our excuses. It receives the blood, yes. It covers the body, yes. But it remembers.

don't confuse burial with silence.
Soil is an archive with green patience.

7. The Boat

There comes a moment when the world turns into too loud for God to ignore.

Violence multiplies. The poor become scenery. The animals grow nervous. The sky lowers its face. Then water enters the story.

Not cup water. Not the water that rinses rice before dinner. The old water. The first water. The water before shape, returning to ask why creation has become a weapon against itself.

And somewhere, someone builds a boat.

I love the boat because it is ridiculous: a wooden argument against extinction. A floating village for the awkward, the frightened, the slow, the creature nobody called beautiful until it was the last of its kind.

Faith often looks insane before the weather changes. It hammers planks in a dry season. It gathers seeds while the market laughs. It feeds animals before saving reputation.

Every survivor exits the boat carrying a debt to everything that entered with him.

8. The Rainbow Scar

After water, color.

That's how mercy often arrives: not as explanation, but as beauty stretched across the wound. The sky doesn't apologize. It opens a scar full of light and asks the living to remember both terror and promise.

I distrust anyone who speaks of judgment without trembling. I distrust anyone who speaks of mercy without obligation.

If the world is spared, what then?
Do we return to the same violence with cleaner clothes?
Do we thank God for survival while sharpening the old knives?

The rainbow is not decoration.
It is heaven saying:
remember what you can become,
and don't make Me grieve like that again.

—

9. Brickmakers

After the flood, humans discovered brick.

Clay again, but no longer soft in the hand of God. Clay hardened by ambition. Clay stacked into height. Clay made obedient to the project.

This is the danger of survival without humility. The children of the rescued decide they will build so high no judgment can reach them. They call it unity. They call it progress. They call it making a name for themselves.

Build houses. Build schools. Build clinics. Build shelters against the next flood.

But beware the tower that exists only to make humanity feel less small before the Infinite.

A tower without mercy is just a prayer that forgot how to kneel.

10. The Translator's Wound

Language was broken, or language was multiplied. It depends on whether you fear difference.

A single language in the mouth of a single empire can become a machine. It can standardize desire, rename theft, erase villages, and make every child recite the same lie before breakfast.

Many tongues make domination harder.
They also make love harder.
That is the bargain.
We must translate.

Translation is not only changing words. It is kneeling before another person's interior weather and admitting your own sky is not the whole climate.

Some words should arrive with dust still on their sandals.
Some words should not be made too comfortable in the language of empire.

When I read the old books, I listen for what survived the crossing.
Usually it is not the argument.
Usually it is the hunger.

11. The Shop of Small Gods

There is always a shop of small gods.

In one age they are carved from wood. In another, minted into coins. In another, printed on flags. In ours, they glow in the hand and ask for the morning before we have thanked the One who gave it.

The old story of the child among idols is not only about statues. It is about courage: the courage to ask what can't answer.

The idol may be beautiful. The idol may be inherited. The idol may have fed your father. The idol may have a festival, a uniform, a bank account, a national anthem.

Still, ask:
Can it hear the widow?
Can it stop the bomb?
Can it teach the rich to tremble?
Can it make the murderer human again?

12. Fire Made Cool

Every age throws someone into fire for refusing the approved lie.

Sometimes the fire is literal. Sometimes it's exile, ridicule, prison, poverty, the family table going silent when you tell the truth. Fire has many uniforms.

The miracle is not always that the flames vanish. Sometimes the miracle is that the soul does not become the shape of what burns it. Sometimes the miracle is

keeping one soft place alive inside the chest while the world claps for hardness.

I ask for that protection.
Not safety from all fire – history has not granted my people that luxury – but coolness inside the blaze.

Let every furnace built for conscience become a doorway.
Let every threatened body carry an unseen garden through the flame.

13. One God, Many Lamps

I've heard people argue over the lamp while forgetting light.

One lamp has glass of blue. One lamp has oil from olives. One lamp is electric, humming in a hospital corridor. One is a candle near a photograph of the dead. For me, one is a screen where a child reads scripture under a blanket.

The lamps differ.
The longing doesn't.

I am not saying all paths are the same. That is too easy, and too disrespectful to the labor of difference. I am saying the human being keeps lifting lamps toward the same terror: death, loneliness, injustice, hunger, the silence after prayer.

Some lamps guide. Some lamps blind. Some lamps burn houses down. So test the flame.

Does it make you more merciful?
Does it make you protect the stranger?
Does it make you less excited by punishment?
If not, you may be holding fire without light.

BOOK IV - LAW AND THE HUMAN FACE

—

14. The Child in the Water

A child enters the story by river.

This is how empires accidentally raise their own question. They fear children, so they make laws against birth. They fear prophecy, so they police the cradle. They fear the future, so they send soldiers to the nursery.

But mothers are older than decrees.

One mother makes a small ark from desperation. She places her child in water, not because water is safe, but because the house has become less safe than the river.

Every refugee mother understands this. The boat is too small; the sea is too large. The border is armed.

Still, the child must move toward some possible mercy.

Never underestimate what God can do with a basket, a sister watching from reeds, and a mother who refuses to surrender the future.

15. The Mountain

Revelation likes height because height strips the crowd from the voice.

The mountain does not flatter. It takes breath from the arrogant and gives it back slowly. It makes the body remember scale. By the time the seeker reaches the cloud, he is less certain of himself, which is the beginning of hearing.

At the mountain, fire doesn't behave like fire. Stone receives command. A barefoot human learns that holy ground is not ground belonging to religion, but ground where the soul stops performing ownership.

Every life has a mountain:
a grief you cannot go around,
a silence you cannot outsource,
a question that follows until you climb into it.

16. Tablets

Law is mercy when memory fails.

A people rescued from slavery doesn't become free by leaving the master's land. The master may still live inside the nervous system. The whip may become a voice. The cage may become a preference.

So law comes. Not as a cage, if held rightly, but as a fence around the newly planted soul.

Do not murder.
Do not steal.

Do not lie so skillfully that truth loses employment.
Rest, because even beasts deserve a day without empire on their backs.

But law is dangerous when separated from mercy; then the fence turns into a weapon. Men begin measuring the poor instead of feeding them.

The law was written on stone because hearts were not ready.
The story is still trying to move it inward.

17. The Mother Under the Star

Every religion eventually comes to a mother.

A mother by a river. A mother in a stable. A mother under a tree. A mother in a palace. A mother on a road with dust in her hair. A mother whose child belongs to history before he belongs to himself.

Men write doctrines around her. Councils argue over her title. Artists paint her in the colors of their own villages. Empires use her tenderness to decorate conquest. Still, beneath all of it, she remains what she was: a woman whose body opened and made room for danger.

No prophecy begins abstractly. It begins with nausea, blood, milk, fear, and someone older saying breathe.

So I distrust any religion that speaks of God but despises women.
It has forgotten the door through which every prophet entered.

18. Milk Theology

Before the sermon, milk.

Before parable, milk.
Before miracle, milk.
Before crowds, enemies, titles, institutions, and names written in gold leaf, there was a mother waking in the dark because the holy was hungry.

This is the scandal no empire can digest:
the Divine, when it enters human story, must be held.
Must be washed.
Must be fed.
Must be protected from fever, knives, kings, winter, and bad luck.

If holiness can cry for milk, then every hungry child is an altar accusing us.

19. The Teacher With Dust on His Feet

The teacher walks because truth can't afford a throne.

Dust gathers on his feet. Children interrupt him. The sick pull at the edge of his day. The poor ask questions with survival hidden inside them. He answers both, but not the same way.

Every tradition has this figure: the one who speaks in stories because direct truth would be killed too quickly. The one who heals, awakens, points, remembers. The one who says the kingdom isn't where the soldiers think it's.

Followers always try to make the teacher less dangerous after death.
They build chairs.
They invent ranks.
They turn the road into an office.

But the dust remains.
Somewhere under the institution, the teacher is still walking.

BOOK V - WOOD, RETURN, AND THE INNER ROAD

—

20. The Tree of Pain

Human beings keep returning to the tree.

The first tree held knowledge. Another tree holds death. Between them stretches the whole human argument: what do we do with what we know, and what do we do with what we suffer?

A tree is rooted and lifted. Earth and sky in one body. No wonder sacred stories choose it when pain needs a shape.

I've seen men turn suffering into spectacle. I've also watched crowds gather around another person's agony and call the looking faith. But pain isn't holy because it hurts. Pain becomes holy only when love enters it and refuses to pass the wound forward.

The tree asks one question:
Will your suffering make you merciful,
or only righteous in your revenge?

21. Bread at the Table

The holiest argument in the world may be bread.

Not abstract bread. Not doctrinal bread. Bread that tears unevenly in human hands. Bread with flour on the wrist. Bread passed across a table where someone has been forgiven but not yet fully trusted.

Every sacred meal says:
the body matters.
Memory must be chewed.
Love has to enter the mouth or it remains an idea with clean clothes.

I remember seeing people argue over the meaning of the meal while leaving actual people hungry outside the door.

This is blasphemy with polished grammar.

If the table doesn't make room for the poor, it is not an altar.
It is furniture.

22. The Prince Who Left Softness

Some stories begin not in poverty but in protection.

A child is kept from suffering the way rich families keep dust from the good room. No sickness. No old age. No

corpse. No hunger. Beauty arranged like a curtain before the window.

Then the curtain moves.

The protected one sees what can't be unseen: the body fails, youth leaves, pleasure is temporary, death is not a rumor. From that moment, the palace becomes another kind of prison.

There are people who meet suffering and become cruel because they can't forgive reality for disappointing them. There are others who meet suffering and begin the long discipline of compassion.

That second road is holy.

Leaving the palace is walking away from any illusion that keeps another person's pain outside your spiritual vocabulary.

23. The Wheel

The wheel turns whether we bless it or curse it.

Birth, hunger, desire, grasping, loss, grief, birth again. Family patterns turning. Empires turning. Names returning under new flags. The abused becoming abuser unless someone interrupts the wheel with unbearable honesty.

Some traditions call the wheel cosmic. Some call it psychological. I've seen enough repetition to believe both.

A man whose father never held him becomes a father who can't open his hands. A country colonized by cruelty teaches cruelty to its police. A sect persecuted for its prayer learns to persecute the prayer next door.

Liberation starts when someone says:
this pain arrived through me,
but it will not leave through my children.

24. The Bowl

The empty bowl isn't emptiness.
It is readiness without arrogance.

A full bowl cannot receive. A clenched doctrine cannot learn. A mind crowded with certainty has no room for wonder to sit down.

I have carried bowls full of ash: my dead, my country, my anger, my suspicion of every beautiful promise. I do not apologize for this. For now, ash is what remains when love survives fire.

But even ash can become too heavy for the begging hand.

The bowl teaches another discipline:
hold what comes,
release what passes,
do not mistake possession for nourishment.

Maybe the soul must become like that before the Divine can pour anything without spilling it.

—

25. The Book Under the Book

Every sacred book has another book underneath it.

The written book. The recited book. The erased book. The mother's version. The children's version told under blankets after soldiers leave. The forbidden commentary. The lost scroll. The oral tradition that refused to die just because no king stamped it official.

I don't believe the Divine is so fragile that it lives only in one surviving manuscript. But I also don't believe all books are equal simply because they are old. Age can sanctify wisdom; it can also preserve poison.

So I read with reverence and suspicion, both.

Reverence because people carried these words through fire. Suspicion because people also used fire to decide which words others were allowed to carry.

26. Numbers

The ancients loved numbers because numbers seemed less corruptible than speech.

A word can be mistranslated; A king can edit a chronicle. A priest can polish a threat until it shines like commandment. But number stands there with strange, cold patience.

One.

Three.

Seven.
Twelve.
Forty.
Again and again the old stories count their way through mystery.

I understand the temptation. When grief becomes chaotic, pattern feels like mercy. Geometry offers a clean hand.

But numbers can become idols too. Men have predicted the end so many times the calendar has begun to pity us.

Let the numbers sing, but don't force them to confess more than they know.
Some mysteries are not codes.
Some are invitations.

27. Scribes

Bless the scribe and fear the scribe.

Bless the hand that preserved the word through famine, empire, migration, damp rooms, and candle smoke. Bless the tired eyes that copied one more line so a child centuries later could ask a better question.

But fear the scribe who serves power without trembling. Fear the editor who removes the woman's voice because it complicates the hierarchy. Fear the translator who turns tenderness into obedience. Fear the historian who calls theft discovery because the thief kept better records.

The scribe is never neutral.
Even the decision to place one story before another is a theology of sequence.

I write this knowing I too am a scribe of smoke.
May my hand be judged by whether it protects the living, honors the dead, and leaves enough space for God to disagree with me.

28. The End Keeps Arriving

Every generation thinks it has reached the final chapter.

The stars look strange. The children stop listening. The rivers dry. The market sells what used to be sacred. The poor become tired of begging for crumbs from people who lecture them about patience.

So someone opens an old prophecy and says: now.

Maybe they are wrong. Maybe they are right. Maybe the end isn't one event but a pattern that visits whenever humanity forgets its covenant with life.

For the family under bombs, the world has ended.
For the mother at the hospital bed, the trumpet has already sounded.
For the prisoner whose name was erased, judgment is paperwork in the present tense.

Do not wait for the sky to split before becoming merciful.
Apocalypse means unveiling.
Let the veil lift now.

29. False Rescue

Beware the rescuer who needs you helpless.

Every age has one: a man, a state, a movement, an institution, a technology, a doctrine, a market, a holy slogan promising to end your fear if you surrender your discernment.

False rescue hates mature people. It wants followers, not witnesses. It wants applause, not conscience. It wants crisis to continue just long enough for dependency to become devotion.

Not every shining figure is light.
and not every miracle is mercy.
Not every peace treaty is peace.
Not every voice from the cloud is God.

How do we test the rescuer?
Watch the least powerful.
Watch the women.
Watch the poor.
Watch the stranger.
Watch the dissenter.
Watch the child who asks the wrong question.

If their freedom shrinks, the rescue is a cage learning hymns.

30. Asha

There is a word for the way things are meant to stand when no one is paid to bend them.

Truth, yes, but not only truth.
Order, yes, but not the order of soldiers.
Righteousness, yes, but not the righteousness that points at everyone else with a clean fingernail.

I mean the hidden straightness inside water finding its course. I mean the promise in seed. I mean the balance that lets a mother sleep without wondering who will sell her child by morning.

Asha is the world before the lie learned bureaucracy.

I have lived long enough to know the straight path is rarely straight on the map. Sometimes it curves around graves. Sometimes it hides in the kitchen where an old woman refuses hatred while washing lentils.

Let me belong to that order.
Not the order of empire.
The order of breath returning clean.

31. Good Thought, Good Word, Good Deed

A thought isn't harmless just because it has no hands yet.
Every prison began as an idea asking for stone.
Every mercy began as a small refusal inside someone who could have looked away.

A word is not good because it is soft.
Sometimes the good word is no.

Sometimes it is enough.
Sometimes it is forgive me before pride has time to hire a lawyer.

A deed is where prayer stops hiding.
Anyone can love humanity from a comfortable distance.
The deed asks for weight: a bag carried, a visit made, a wage paid fairly, a rumor not repeated, a stranger fed before the theology of strangers is settled.

Let the mind shelter light.
And let the mouth leave the air more honest.
Let the hand become useful.

32. Two Spirits at the Door

Every morning, two visitors stand at the door.

One says:
Make yourself cleaner by making someone else dirty.

The other says:
Sweep your own room first.

One says:
You were hurt, therefore you may hurt.

The other says:
You were hurt, therefore you know what must not be multiplied.

I used to imagine evil as a monster outside the village.
Now I know it also arrives as convenience. As appetite. As silence when speech would cost me.

The battle isn't only cosmic.
It is Tuesday.
It is the message I send.
It is the money I keep.
It is the person I become when no one is clapping.

33. The Garden Learns the World Is One

At first, every flower thought it was the garden.

The rose praised red. The jasmine praised white. The olive praised patience. The cedar praised height. The wheat praised hunger for giving it purpose.

Then the rain came and didn't choose.

It entered root, thorn, seed, soil, cracked pot, abandoned field. It touched the poisonous plant too, not because poison was holy, but because rain isn't afraid of what it must transform.

This is how I understand unity now:
not sameness,
not the murder of difference,
not one song forced into every throat.

Unity is a garden where each thing grows true enough to feed the whole.

A people becomes mature when it stops asking which flower God loves most and starts asking why the soil is starving.

34. The Two Wings

A bird can't negotiate with one wing.

It can flap. It can panic. It can make noise that resembles effort. But it can't rise.

I've seen nations try to fly while binding half their sky. I've also watched men call the cage protection and then wonder why the future crawls.

If the girl isn't educated, the village limps.
If the woman is not heard, the law walks in circles.
If the mother is honored only as sacrifice, men will keep asking her to disappear beautifully.

No.

Let both wings open.
And let the daughter read.
Let the mother decide.
Let the sister inherit.
Let the beloved speak without being called storm.

35. The Feast of Many Lamps

I return again to the table at the end of the world.
Only now, I see the lamps more clearly.

One burns with desert oil.
One with mountain wind.
One with river smoke.
One with the blue patience of ocean night.
One with a flame kept alive by hands that refused the lie.

One with light from a garden where every color was allowed to praise.

No lamp says:
Extinguish the others so I may be seen.

That is how I know we have reached the true feast.

The hungry arrive from every road. Some bring scripture. Some bring doubt. Some bring only the animal need to sit down without being hunted.

God, if God is merciful, doesn't ask the starving for perfect vocabulary before bread.

Eat first.
Then tell me what name carried you here.

36. Final Prayer for the Old Story

Let clay remember clay.
Let breath remember its Source.
Let brothers see brothers before fields learn more blood.
Let every flood teach us to build boats for others.
Let every tower fall before it requires slaves.
Let every language carry its dead with tenderness.
Let every idol crack first inside the self.

Let law become mercy with bones.
Let mercy become law with a heart.
Let mothers be honored beyond metaphor.
Let children be protected beyond prophecy.
Let teachers remain walking even after institutions try to seat them on thrones.

Let the end unveil us before it destroys us.
Let the beast be recognized in the mirror early enough to starve it.
Let every false rescuer lose his costume.
Let the golden age begin as bread.

And when the final table is set, let no one ask which road brought the hungry there.
Let the answer be simple:
They came by sorrow.
They came by longing.
They came by God.

Clay.
Breath.
Fire.
Garden.
Table.

One human family learning, at last, how not to burn the house while praising the light.

Within the Word

Before the Letter

Before the letter turned into obedient,
before it stood in lines
and waited for a teacher's chalk,
it was a living thing.

A sound had a back.
A vowel had a pulse.
A mark on clay remembered
hoof, horn, river, tooth.

No alphabet was born clean.
It came from hunger,
from counting the sheep before winter,
from naming the son before fever,
from scratching a wound into stone
so the dead would not disappear.

I don't trust a word
until I've heard what animal
still breathes beneath it.

Every sentence carries an old body.
Every page has bones.

--

The Edge of the Tongue

A letter is not a brick.
It is an edge.

It stands where silence ends
and consequence starts.

Say mother,
and the room changes temperature.
Say exile,
and the floor remembers footsteps.
Say God,
and even unbelief
sits up straighter.

So I fear language
and return to it anyway.

A word is a cliff
with flowers growing near the drop.
A word is a door
that might open into mercy
or into a room full of men
pretending not to hear the child.

I put my tongue near the edge.
I don't jump.
I listen.

--

The Clean Name

They love a clean name
for an unclean thing.

They call the hunger
insecurity.
They call the cage
policy.
They call the stolen house
a matter under review.
They call the dead
an outcome.

I have watched a word
walk into the river covered in blood
and come back from the ministry
wearing a white shirt.

don't let language bathe too long
in the hands of power.
It forgets the smell of the body.

Name the wound before it is renamed.
Name the thief before he turns into an office.
Name the child before the number arrives.

The clean name is often
where the murder hides.

--

Breath Has Memory

Breath isn't empty.
It carries rooms.

My father's last argument
is somewhere in my lungs.
My mother's call to prayer
moves through my throat
when I think I am only sighing.
My daughter's laughter
still tries to leave my mouth
when I wake too quickly.

The body remembers
what the mind files away.

That's why prayer starts with breath.
This is why grief changes the voice.
This is why the one who cannot speak
is not silent,
but crowded.

I breathe in.
Ash.
Sea.
Old bread.
The damp cloth on a fevered forehead.

I breathe out.
A name that refuses burial.

--

Farewell With a Lamp Inside

Every farewell is a small chapel.
Even the casual ones.
Even the careless ones
thrown over the shoulder
at a train station.

Goodbye was once larger than itself.
A blessing folded down
until the divine fit
inside a pocket of speech.

I have said goodbye
to people who returned
and to people who became rooms
I can never enter again.

The word knows the difference.
The mouth does not.

So I bless more carefully now.
Go guarded.
Go seen.
Go with the mercy
I can't provide.
Go with the God
I have argued with
but never fully left.

Every departure deserves a lamp.

--

The Administrative Grave

A drawer can bury a man.
A file can swallow a village.
A report can turn a mother's scream
into manageable language.

I've seen grief translated
into categories,
then categories translated
into silence.

There is a violence
that does not raise its voice.
It stamps.
It dates.
It archives.
It asks for another form
while the house is still burning.

Bring back the short word.
The honest word.
The word that still limps.

Do not call the shaking man
a case.
Do not call the starving woman
a metric.
Do not call the bombed street
a sector.

--

The River and the Vault

Money speaks in water words
because it wants to seem natural.

Flow.
Current.
Liquid.
Frozen.
Drained.
A rising tide.
A dry market.

But the river wasn't born
with locked gates.
The river didn't invent interest.
The river didn't decide
which child drinks
and which child learns thirst
as a family tradition.

A vault is a dam
with better manners.
A bank is a river
trained to obey certain hands.

I stand at the edge
of this manufactured water
and think of the mother

counting coins beside a sink
that coughs air.
Tell me again
this isn't ritual.

--

The Body Given Papers

A body receives a seal
and becomes larger than the living.
It can't ache,
but it demands your back.
It can't dream,
but it rents your mornings.
It can't love,
but it measures loyalty
by how much of your face
is still bright at closing time.
This is the strange resurrection
of the modern world:
not Lazarus,
not miracle,
but paperwork.
A dead thing with a nameplate.
A hunger with a boardroom.
A mouth with no lips
asking everyone to smile.

I leave the building
and the evening feels almost holy,
not because I am free,
but because the sky
has never asked me
for a password.

--

The Bright Little Oracle

The old oracle required smoke,
travel,
coins,
a trembling priestess.

Now the oracle glows
in the hand.
It answers before the heart
has finished forming the question.
It knows what I fear,
what I want,
what I almost bought,
what face keeps me from sleep.

I ask where the soul goes
after the roof falls.
It offers links.

I ask how to forgive a century.
It offers summaries.

I ask for my dead.
It gives me maps.
So I close the screen
and step outside.
A stray cat watches me
from the wall
with more ancient knowledge
than the machine can organize.

--

Distance Learns Command

Distance learned how to command us.
From across the room,
a button changes the light.
From across the sea,
an order changes a village.
From across the screen,
a rumor changes the blood.
We call it remote
as if distance were innocent.
But command does not become gentle
because the hand stays clean.
The one who presses
is still touching
what burns.

I put down the device.
My thumb throbs
with tiny empires.

Outside,
a bird lands on a wire
and leaves without needing
anyone's permission.

--

The Ear That Came to Conquer

The conqueror misheard us
and called it scholarship.

He heard devotion
and wrote spectacle.
He heard grief
and wrote custom.
He heard a mother
calling the name of her dead
and wrote superstition
in careful ink.

This is another theft:
not the taking of land,
but the bending of sound
until a prayer becomes
someone else's joke.

I place my ear to the ground.
The original vibration
is still there.

No empire has ever mastered
the first sound of a mother
calling a child home.

--

A Syllable for Mercy

Some syllables are wells.
You lower your mouth
and pull up more
than sound.

There are names I cannot say
without washing first.
There are prayers I don't finish
because the first word
has already opened me.

The sacred is not always thunder.
Sometimes it is a vowel
sitting beside the wound
until the wound stops
mistaking itself
for the whole body.

I repeat one small sound
and the room becomes wider.

Not cured.
Not solved.
Wider.

Sometimes mercy starts
as extra space
inside the chest.

--

Against Soft Names

Do not soften the knife
while it is still in the body.

don't call the orphan
an affected minor.
don't call theft
a transfer.
don't call fear
public order.
don't call obedience
peace.

The soft name is a pillow
placed over the face of truth.

I write this for every mouth
that was trained to sound reasonable
while describing the unreasonable.

Say the word plainly.
Let it be ugly

if the thing is ugly.
Let it be heavy
if the thing is heavy.

Language isn't holy
because it is beautiful.
It is holy
when it refuses to assist the lie.

--

Words Want Bodies

A word leaves the mouth
looking for a body.

Sometimes it becomes a room.
Sometimes it becomes a fist.
Sometimes it becomes bread
arriving at the neighbor's door
before pride can stop it.

That's why prophets tremble.
This is why poets are watched.
This is why mothers warn children
not to curse themselves
for sport.

I have spoken carelessly
and found the sentence years later
living in someone else's fear.

I have also said one kind thing
into a stranger's despair
and watched a small bridge appear
where there had been only water.

Speak as if the unseen
keeps excellent records.

--

Cells of Light

A cell is a prison.
A cell is a body.
A cell is a battery.
A cell is a monk's room
where silence learns discipline.

don't let one meaning
own the word.

Inside me,
small citizens keep working.
Blood. Salt. Nerve. Flame.
A whole republic
beneath the skin.

For years I spoke to them
like a tyrant.
Lazy body.
Broken body.
Traitor body.

Now I try another law.
Tired body.
Faithful body.
Village that carried me
through fire
without applause.

--

The Sentence That Entered the Blood

Some sentences enter the blood
and pretend to be biology.

You are nothing.
You are too much.
You are late.
You are dirty.
You are impossible to love.

A child hears it once.
The body repeats it for years.

I don't believe every wound
can be healed by speech.
I have buried faithful people.
I've watched medicine fail
and prayer arrive tired.

But I know despair isn't neutral.
I know the body listens

when the mind speaks
from a throne of fear.
So I answer the old sentence
with bread in my voice.
Come back.
there's morning somewhere.
there's water somewhere.
there's a door inside the breath
we have not opened yet.

--

The Borrowed Spirit

Not every spirit comes from God.
Some arrive in glass.
Some arrive in applause.
Some arrive in the crowd
that tells you to forget your name
for one night.
I don't preach.
Sorrow has many cups,
and I've watched good people
drink because the day
had no mercy left.
But I have learned
that every loosening
isn't freedom.

Every fire isn't revelation.
Every voice that enters you
should not be allowed
to rearrange the house.

--

The Week Remembers the Sky

The week isn't only labor.
It is a folded sky.

One day carries the moon
like a bowl of milk.
One day carries iron.
One day wears the sandals
of the messenger.
One day keeps thunder
under its tongue.
One day smells of roses.
One day sits with the old devourer
and counts what time has eaten.
One day opens gold
across the roofs.

We turned these planets
into appointments.
Rent due.
Call back.

Doctor.
Deadline.
Still, the days remember.
Even under fluorescent light,
heaven leaks through the calendar.

--

When the Door Is Ready

The door doesn't open
because I found a clever word.
The door opens
when the word becomes honest
inside me.
Open, says grief.
Open, says the scar.
Open, says the child
still sitting in the locked room
with one shoe missing.
I do not command the stone.
I confess before it.
I have loved my cages.
I have called fear wisdom.
I have mistaken isolation
for depth.
I have kept old keys

because I was afraid
of what freedom would ask.

The door opens slowly.
Not because I mastered the spell.
Because the spell
finally told the truth.

--

Beauty After Fire

Beauty isn't perfection.

Beauty is the blue door
on a ruined street.
Beauty is the girl
singing to a broken doll
as if the world still deserves music.
Beauty is the old man
feeding pigeons
beside the checkpoint
with the patience of a saint
who refuses the title.

Do not call this resilience too quickly.
Comfortable people love that word.
They praise the suffering
instead of stopping the wound.

I say beautiful
only when I mean:

Nobody succeeded
in removing the light.
I say beautiful
and hear defiance
inside the flower.

--

Proverbs Still Smell of Animals

Our sayings keep old farms alive.
The goat, the horse,
the sheep, the fox,
the wolf at the edge
of the village fire.
A city man repeats a proverb
and does not know
there is hay in his mouth.
Language remembers animals
better than we do.
It remembers the stable,
the anxious mare,
the raven at dawn,
the dog who knew the storm
before the door did.
I love these buried worlds.
They prove that speech
isn't made only of thought.

It is made of mud,
fur,
milk,
hoofbeat,
weather.

Even the clever sentence
once slept near a barn.

--

The Prefix Is a Wall

A small beginning
can imprison the root.

Un-.
Dis-.
In-.
Im-.

Possible becomes impossible.
Visible becomes invisible.
Ease becomes disease.
Known becomes unknown.

How many children
were made smaller
by a sound placed before them?
How many nations
were called uncivilized
by ships carrying polished ruin?

How many people
mistook a borrowed prefix
for their true name?

I remove the false beginning
carefully,
like wire from the throat.

The root is still alive.
It was never the root
that failed.

--

The Machine That Answers

The machine answers faster
than wisdom can arrive.

It gathers fragments,
arranges them cleanly,
comes back them with confidence.

I ask it about mercy.
It explains.

I ask it about hunger.
It defines.

I ask it about the child
under the concrete.
It offers context.

There is use here.
There is danger here.
Every oracle eventually learns
to imitate the priest.

I keep one rule:
No answer is complete
until it has touched bread,
body,
neighbor,
grief.

Knowledge that can't kneel
may still be information,
but it isn't yet wisdom.

--

Prayer for Mispronounced Names

For the names bent
by hurried tongues.

For the grandmother
whose accent was treated
like a damaged chair.
For the boy who shortened himself
so the teacher would stop bleeding him
in front of the class.
For the girl whose surname

carried mountains
no officer cared to climb.

Let the original sound return.
And let the throat remember its village.
And let the mouth of power fail
and the mouth of love prevail.

A name isn't decoration.
it's a small homeland.

Pronounce it carefully.
Someone's dead
may be living there.

--

Small Vocabulary, Smaller Soul

They shrink the words
and call it clarity.
They remove the dangerous nouns
and call it peace.
They make certain thoughts impossible
by stealing the doors
that led to them.

So I begin my own recitation.
Bread.
Empire.
Mother.
Worker.

Occupation.
Mercy.
Land.
Lie.
God.
Enough.

Each word widens the room.
Each word brings back
a piece of stolen furniture.

A people with no words
for their wound
will be taught to thank
the hand that made it.

I repeat the old words
until language stands again
on trembling legs.

Hope Keeps a Window Open

Hope isn't a weak thing.

Hope has washed blood
from the doorstep
and still planted mint
beside the kitchen wall.

Hope has counted the graves
and gone home
to bake bread for the living.

Hope is not ignorance.
Hope knows the numbers.
Hope knows the names.
Hope has seen the body.

Still, it leaves a window open
for the impossible
because certainty
has a habit of becoming
another prison.

I refuse any wisdom
that humiliates longing.

The poor don't hope
because they are naive.
They hope because despair
is a luxury
history has not allowed them.

--

Roots Under Ash

Every dark word
has a root looking for water.

Disaster once looked upward
and blamed the stars.

Desire once meant
to miss a star.
Consider once meant
to sit with the stars
long enough
to be instructed by distance.

Language is full
of buried heavens.

I dig under ash
and find roots
still trying.
From exile,
a road.
From wound,
a mouth.
From grief,
a seed that has not decided
whether it will become
flower or testimony.

The fire did not finish
the underground work.

--

The Last Word Before Dawn

Let the word come back to breath.
Let breath return to body.

Let body return to earth.
Let earth return to the One
who needs no name
and answers to many.

Let the false names fall.
And let the dead be called dead.
And let the hungry be called owed.
Let the poor be called robbed.
Let the child be called holy.

Let no screen become the sky.
Let no office become the soul.
Let no clever phrase
cover the wound.

And when dawn comes,
if dawn comes,
let me stand barefoot
in the grammar of birds
and say:
I was misnamed,
but not erased.
I was broken,
but not translated.
I was buried,
but the root kept speaking.

--

The Guest in the Chest

Some nights,
a thought comes
and behaves like a guest
who has forgotten to leave.

It sits in the chest.
It drinks from the pulse.
It uses the old plates.
It speaks in the voice
of someone who once wounded me
and insists the voice is mine.

I don't call it a demon
so quickly.
That would make it too important.

I call it by its smaller names.
Fear.
Shame.
Loneliness.
The child who wasn't held.
The country that never wrote back.

Every named thing loses
one tooth.
Every unnamed thing
keeps chewing.

--

What I Feed Becomes Familiar

Attention is food.

Feed anger long enough
and it learns the hallway.
Feed grief long enough
and it asks for a room.
Feed resentment long enough
and it starts opening the mail.

But I have also fed mercy.
I have fed discipline.
I've also fed the small flame
that says:
not today,
not this mouth,
not this house.

The unseen isn't only shadow.
It is also garden.
It grows what I water
when I am not looking.

Each morning I ask:
What am I raising
that will one day stand before me
and call me creator?

--

The Inner Country

Imagination is not pretend.
It is a country before construction.

Before the bridge,
distance argued with need.
Before the table,
hunger drew a rectangle
in the mind.
Before the song,
pressure gathered in the ribs
and searched for a door.

Everything made
was once invisible
and asking for hands.

I am careful now
with the inner country.
Not because every fear
becomes fact,
but because repeated vision
trains the body where to walk.

The tyrant imagines enemies
until the nation builds cells.
The mother imagines dinner
from almost nothing
and Tuesday survives.

The first law
inside the unseen country
must be mercy.

--

A Fig in the Dark

Close your eyes.
Say fig.
There it is:
skin soft as dusk,
inside it a red congregation
of tiny seeds.
No tree entered the room.
No branch crossed the threshold.
Still, the fruit appeared
because language touched image
and the mind opened its market.
If one word can make fruit,
what has repetition made of me?
What cage have I built
by rehearsing fear?
What wolf have I drawn
by whispering danger
into every morning?
I don't blame the wounded
for seeing what survival taught them.

But I place new fruit
in the dark.
Bread.
Door.
Lamp.
Sea.
Daughter.
Return.

Let the inner orchard
learn another season.

--

Rest as Root

I won't insult exhaustion
by calling it laziness.

Sometimes the spirit lies down
because standing became theater.
Sometimes the mind darkens
because it carried furniture
that belonged to the dead,
the nation,
the father,
the debt,
the old fear.

Rest, then.
But rest as the field rests.

Not dead.
Gathering root.
Rest as winter rests.
Not empty.
Guarding seed.
When one small strength comes back,
make something small.
Wash the cup.
Open the window.
Write the sentence.
Call the friend.

The Small Tool

A pencil is a humble wand.
Wood, carbon, pressure,
a little point of intention.
It doesn't promise lightning.
It doesn't threaten the sky.
It waits between my fingers
for the hand to become honest.
The first draft is wood.
The second is sharpening.
The third is dust
curling under the blade.

I have erased myself before.
I've also pressed too hard
and torn the page.
I've also written words
I later had to forgive.

Still, the tool teaches mercy.
A mark can change.
A line can bend.
The blank page is not emptiness.
It is permission.

--

HOUSE OF LIGHTNING

The brain is a house
built from wet lightning.

Rooms of nerve.
Stairs of pulse.
Windows opening
onto chemical dawns.

But the mind is weather
moving through the house.

No surgeon lifts a memory
like a coin from the floor.
No microscope catches the exact moment
hope changes clothes.

Still, the weather is real.
Fog hides the stairs.
Storms break windows.
Warm wind makes
old curtains breathe.

So I tend both:
house and weather,
medicine and prayer,
bread and breath,
friend at the door,
sky above the walking body.

To guide the mind
isn't to become a tyrant
inside yourself.
it's to become a patient keeper
of weather.

--

The Soul's Diet

Everything enters.

The song.
The headline.
The joke with a knife in it.
The advertisement whispering:
you are almost worthy.
The friend blessing your courage.

The enemy renting a room
in your imagination.

The eye is a gate.
The ear is a gate.
The tongue is a gate
that can feed the prison
or feed the garden.

I have swallowed too much smoke
and called it knowledge.
I've watched too much fire
and called it witness.

Now I ask:
What am I allowing
into the temple?

Not the clean temple.
The real one.
The one with unpaid bills,
achy knees,
old grief in the cupboard,
and a lamp that still works
when I remember the match.

--

Return by Hand

When the mind has been away too long,
I don't drag it home
by the hair.

I light a small task.

Fold the shirt.
Open the window.
Place the cup in water.
Write one true line.
Walk to the corner.
Touch the book.

Return to the work
as the injured bird comes back
to the idea of sky.

Meaning often asks for hands.
So I give it mine
before I feel ready.

I don't wait
to be healed
before making a mark.
I make the mark
and let the mark remind me
I am still able
to touch the world
without only bleeding on it.

--

Wise Enough for Morning

Stay wise.
Not clever.
Clever built the cage
and called it efficiency.
Clever sold the wound
a subscription.
Clever renamed loneliness
as independence
and hunger as discipline.

Wise is older.
Wise feeds the sick man soup
while still questioning the empire.
Wise knows thought has power
and still carries the groceries.
Wise lets the exhausted sleep
without making sleep a god.

If dark weather rises in you,
name it.
If fear asks for food,
don't set the table.
If the world says your attention
belongs to the market,
walk toward the river.

There is still bread somewhere.
There is still morning somewhere.

There is still a door inside the breath
we have not tried yet.

The Etymology of Smoke

2. HARF

In Arabic, a letter is harf—
also an edge,
also a border,
also the lip of a cliff.

That's why language is dangerous.

Every word stands on an edge.
Say mother, and milk appears.
Say martyr, and the soil darkens.
Say homeland, and someone reaches
for a key that no longer opens anything.

The mystic doesn't ask,
"What does this word mean?"

The mystic asks,
"What cliff does this word stand beside?"
"What fell from it?"
"What climbed back with bleeding hands?"

"What angel was pushed?"
"What child was renamed?"

A letter is not a brick.
A letter is a threshold.

Put enough thresholds together
and men will call it law.
Put enough thresholds together
and women will call it prayer.
Put enough thresholds together
and children will call it home
until the soldiers arrive
with dictionaries.

3. The Dictionary Was Once a Graveyard

Every dictionary is a cemetery
with excellent manners.

The words lie alphabetized,
washed of blood,
pronounced correctly
by men who never heard them scream.

Here rests mercy,
formerly a hand on the fevered brow.

Here rests freedom,
last seen walking barefoot
through a checkpoint.

Here rests collateral,
a word invented so children
could be buried without interrupting lunch.

Here rests security,
who swallowed the keys
and called the cage protection.

Here rests moderation,
who learned to wear censorship
as a clean white shirt.

Here rests surveillance,
the polite nephew of spying.

Here rests messaging,
the perfume they sprayed
over propaganda.

I close the book; the dead inside it cough.

13. Spell Against Renaming

Do not let them rename the wound
until the wound forgets who opened it.

don't let them rename the child
until the child becomes a statistic
small enough to carry on television.

Do not let them rename hunger
as pressure.
Do not let them rename thirst
as management.

Do not let them rename a locked gate
as complexity.

I place the name back in the mouth.
I place the mouth back in the body.
I place the body back in the room.
I place the room back in the city.
I place the city back beneath the sky
where no abbreviation can bury it.

I don't mean magic. I mean accuracy with candles.

Every false name is a little empire.
Every true name is a door remembering its hinge.

I say the name once for the witness.
I say it twice for the mother.
I say it three times for the archive
that refuses to become smoke.

Let the renamed return.
And let the mispronounced stand upright.
Let the unsaid enter the room with clean feet.

No wound is healed by becoming vague.
No people is saved by becoming easy to say.

The name remains.
The name remains.
The name remains.

23. The Oracle Has a Database Now

Once, the oracle sat above vapors
and spoke in riddles
men paid kingdoms to misunderstand.

Now the oracle lives in servers; ask, and it answers.

Ask again, and it learns
the shape of your hunger.

The priestess at Delphi
has become a search bar.

The temple is cooled by machines.

The prophecy comes
with targeted advertisements.

I ask:
Where is my daughter?

The machine offers maps.
I ask:

Where is the soul after bombing?
The machine offers articles.

I ask:
What is the etymology of mercy?

The machine pauses,
as if mercy were not in the database
but in the hand
that closes the laptop
and goes outside
to feed someone.

24. A Spell for the Ones Who Were Misheard

For the names bent by foreign mouths.
For the prayers turned cartoon.
For the chants made glossary.
For the villages renamed for easier maps.

For the grandmother
whose accent was treated
like broken furniture.

For the boy
who shortened his name
so the teacher would stop wounding it.

For the girl
whose surname carried mountains
no passport officer could pronounce.

For Hasan becoming nonsense.
For Husayn becoming joke.
For Khuda becoming exotic.
For Allah becoming argument
in mouths that never learned mercy.

Let the original sound return; let the throat remember its ancestors.

Let the empire's ear fail
and the mother's ear prevail.

Let every stolen syllable
find its way back
to the tongue that loved it first.

28. Final Spell Before Dawn

Let the word come back to breath.
And let the breath return to body.
Let the body return to earth.
Let the earth return to God.

Let every false name fall away
like ash from the baker's sleeve.

Let empire lose its thesaurus.

Let the dead be called dead,
the poor be called robbed,
the hungry be called owed,
the child be called holy.

Let no corporation drink
another lifetime unnoticed.

Let no screen become the sky.
Let no algorithm finish the prayer.

Let the river remember
it was not born to serve the bank.

Let farewell become blessing again.

Let hello become presence,
not habit.

Let language be washed
in the mouth of the merciful.

Let every alphabet kneel
before the first wound

and ask permission
to continue.

And when dawn comes—
if dawn comes—
let me stand barefoot
in the grammar of birds,

saying:

I was misnamed,
but not erased.

I was broken,
but not translated.

I was buried,
but the root kept speaking.

The Old Door

Tween All Hallows' Eve and Saturnalia

The Choir Beneath the Burning

The fire does not sing alone.
Beneath the crackle, a buried choir gathers,
voices with soot on their vowels,
throats that remember being called by names
before the world learned how to shorten them.

I hear them under the timber:
not revenge,
not spectacle,
not the drunken joy of watching something fall,
but the low hymn of matter returning to mercy.

Bone, bless the flame.
Flame, spare the soul.
Soul, remember the door; door, open only toward morning.

I place what harmed me in the heat; I don't place the human being there.
This is the discipline:
to burn the curse

without learning to love the burning.

--

Three Bells in the Blood

One bell for love,
not the soft love sold in little rooms,
but the love that walks into winter
with another person's coat in its hands.

One bell for wisdom,
not the cold wisdom of men who stand above pain,
but the wisdom that kneels close enough
to learn the smell of the wound.

One bell for mercy,
not permission,
not forgetting,
not a crown lowered gently on the head of harm,
but mercy with a clean blade,
cutting the knot
and refusing to cut the child tied inside it.

Ring, then.
Ring in the ribs.
Ring until the old abyss understands
we have brought instruments it can't silence.

--

The Moon Learns My Name

Under the harvest light, I stopped pretending
the night didn't know me.
It knew the ankle I dragged from childhood.
It knew the room where I swallowed questions.
It knew the first ghost who mistook my silence
for a place to sleep.

So I stood beneath the moon
and let my shadow confess before I did.
There was a field inside me; there was a blade.
There was a reaper wearing my own tired face.

Cut what is false, I said; leave what can feed the living.
Take the bitter crop,
the inherited fear,

the theatre of being cursed; leave the seed that still knows rain.

The moon lowered its pale hand; it did not bless me.
It harvested.

--

When the Treasury Is Quiet

There are nights when creation sounds emptied out.
No new soul at the sill.
No bright child waiting in the invisible archive.
Only a long hush behind the ribs of the world.

In that hush, I ask the older question:
what if silence isn't absence?
What if the treasury rests because every soul
has been asked to return and repair what it broke?
What if the unborn aren't gone,
but listening at the gate,
waiting for the living to make earth less cruel
before they agree to enter it?

I don't fear an empty heaven.
I fear a full earth
that has forgotten how to welcome.

--

Lazarus

He rose, not by grace, but by command,
Pulled from the void by an unseen hand.
Lazarus, the defiant, the returned, the awake,
Bound now to a wyrd he didn't stake.
Life from death, but at what cost?
A man restored, but a soul lost.
The Lazarus Effect, a lesson to learn,

--

Djinn and Tonic

A tonic brewed under a blood-red sky,
Infused with whispers of the Djinn's sly.
Drink not in haste, for it binds and twists,
The Djinn's essence in every mist.

A potion to grant, but also to take,
A sip of power, a soul to break.
For the Djinn laughs as it weaves its charm,
Its tonic a blessing, but also a harm.

--

The Girls Who Would Not Burn

They called them witches
because the village needed a mouth for its fear.
A girl with a strange laugh.
A woman too poor to be protected.
A healer who knew the bitter names of plants.
A widow whose silence made men nervous.

The town wanted thunder.
It wanted rope.
It wanted a confession shaped like smoke.
But the dead kept their own music.
Not a dance for the crowd; not a spectacle for judges.
A footstep beneath the soil; A heel on the throat of false witness.
A gathering after the fire went home ashamed.

Listen close.
The graveyard isn't quiet.
It is refusing the verdict in harmony.

--

Circle for the Ones Who Ran

I come from flight.
Do not mistake that for running away.
Some families survive by learning the road
before the road admits it is a road; some grandmothers pack the future in cloth.
Some fathers burn their maps to keep the children warm.
Some mothers cross water carrying names
the border never earned the right to pronounce.

From flight came fight.
Not the cheap fight that needs an audience.
Not the crowd-fire that eats its own young.
The older fight:
to keep breathing when disappearance becomes policy,
to keep loving when history offers only iron,
to stand outside the rebellion

when rebellion forgets the child at the door.

I step into the ring; the fire recognizes me.
It does not crown me.
It says:
you were not made safe.
you were made impossible to erase.

--

The Light of the Lamp

A flickering lamp, a gateway to the mind,
Where shadows stretch and truth is confined.
The human mind, a labyrinth of fire,
Lit by the lamp's ever-burning pyre.
Paranormal whispers echo within,
A light to expose, a light to begin.
For in the glow, the veil grows thin,
Revealing the depths of the soul's own sin.

--

Samhain

At summer's end, the green world shuts its eye,
The sickle sleeps beneath a bruise-dark sky.
The harvest done, the colder kingdom nears,
A throne of frost, a court of listening fears.

The veil grows thin, the dead rehearse their names,
They enter softly through the smoke of flames.
Not ghost, not god, not memory, not bone,
But all the things the living left alone.

The Druids stand where root and ember meet,
With ash on tongue and prophecy at feet.
They read the future in the wounded spark,
And call it wisdom when it comes from dark.

So burn the crop, the costume, and the lie,
Let every borrowed face confess or die.
For Samhain knows what daylight can't see:
The dead are doors. The living are the key.

--

A Chorus for the Unquiet

Verse 1

I heard the dead in the rafters,
not accusing, only cold.

They had walked through too much forgetting
to be frightened of the old.

Pre-Chorus

Who will open?
Who will keep?
Who will name us
while the living sleep?

Chorus

Come near, but don't enter wrong; come grief, but don't make a throne.
Come ghost, if you have come with song; come lost, but leave the child alone.

Verse 2

The night bent low to hear them,
the moon stood still as bone.
I set bread upon the threshold
and a cup for the unknown.

Final Chorus

Come near, but don't enter wrong.
Come grief, but do not make a throne; come soul, if you have carried long.
Come home, but let the living own
the morning.

--

Strange New Reality

A world reborn in ash and flame,
A strange new reality, never the same.
The sun burns cold, the sky a haze,
Time fractured into endless days.
Survivors wander, their minds unmoored,
Through a landscape both alien and obscured.
Yet from the ruin, a spark of hope,
A chance to rebuild, a way to cope.

--

All Who Could No Longer Be Heard

A prayer for the lost, the silent, the still,
For those in hiding, against their will.
Their voices muted, their presence unseen,
In the shadows they linger, caught in betwixt.
We call to you now, with reverence and plea,
Come forth, oh hidden, let your souls be free.

Though the world has forgotten, we will recall,
All who could no longer be heard by all.

--

The Animal Mask

The child is dressed in horn and hide,
A little demon at the mother's side.
Not made for fear, but made to pass
The dead unseen through winter grass.

A mask is mercy, strange and old,
A borrowed beast against the cold.
The wolf, the stag, the crow, the hare,
Each face a prayer the night may spare.

For if the wandering dead draw near,
Let them mistake the child for fear.
Let them look once and turn away,
Back through the smoke, back into clay.

Oh animal mask, oh holy skin,
Teach the soul how to survive within.
Not every disguise is made to deceive;
Some are the only way to leave.

--

Pomona's Apple

An apple floats where the dark waters gleam,
Round as a planet, red as a dream.
Pomona laughs in the orchard's throat,
Whilst old gods cross in a Roman coat.

Fruit of the branch, fruit of the grave,
Sweet little moon the children crave.
Bite it once and autumn bleeds,
Bite it twice and the old world feeds.

The dead don't hunger for bread alone,
They hunger for scent, for seed, for stone.
They hunger for names that fell from trees,
For mothers calling through winter leaves.

So let the apple circle the bowl,
A red small lantern for the soul.
Whoever catches it with their teeth
Will taste the orchard underneath.

--

March Beneath the Stone

They marched without drums under the law; boots soft as conspiracy.
Breath folded into cellar air.
The whole kingdom asleep above them,
dreaming of order while powder learned patience.

Every age has men who believe
the world can be purified by a single blast.
Every age has rulers who make that belief easier
by closing every peaceful door first.

So hear the lesson under the floor:
rage is not wrong because it burns.
Rage is wrong when it forgets
who will be standing near the fire.

Let the march end before the match.
Let the hidden stairs lead upward.
Let the hands that carried thunder
learn to carry bread.

--

The Coal Cellar Psalm

There are churches above and chambers below,
There are hymns men sing and fuses they know.
There is mercy in daylight, rage under stone,
And a kingdom afraid of its own carved throne.

The cellar doesn't ask what faith you keep.
It keeps the breath of those who creep.
It keeps the barrel, the boot, the key,
The letter that betrays conspiracy.

One man writes ere the rack,
One man writes when the bones write back.
The hand that signed in human form
Returns as weather after the storm.

And what is torture but a broken quill,
A state teaching silence to speak its will?
The body bends, the ink runs thin,
But history keeps the pressure in.

So don't praise the powder's plan.
Do not crown the hunted man.
Only ask, when bonfires rise,
What empire hides behind its skies.

--

Remember, But Do Not Worship

Remember the spark, but not the scream.
Remember the plot, but not the dream
That says one blast can cleanse a throne
Or make a wounded people whole.

Remember the cellar, the coal-black air,
The barrel's sleep, the lantern's stare.
Remember the hand that shook to write,
The name reduced by pain and night.

But don't worship fire's rage,
Do not make blood into a page.
The bonfire's lesson, if rightly read,
Is not to multiply the dead.

It is to see how kingdoms make
The faithful bend until they break.
It is to see how vengeance lies:
A crown may fall, but ash still cries.

--

Bonfire Litany

Lyric

Verse 1
Build it high where the cold winds go,
Stack the sticks where the old names glow.

November comes with a sulfur tongue,
Singing of crimes that were never unsung.

Pre-Chorus
Who held the match?
Who wrote the law?
Who kissed the wound
And yclept it awe?

Chorus
Burn, bonfire, burn,
But teach us what the flames have learned.
Not every light is mercy made,
Not every shadow should be blamed.
Burn, bonfire, burn,
Let every violent altar turn.
If we must remember the night of the plot,
Let us remember what hatred forgot.

Verse 2
Under Parliament, under prayer,
Men made thunder beneath the stair.
A king above, a cellar below,
A country split by the seeds it sowed.

Bridge
Do not make saints from smoke,
Do not make gods from grief.
The fire that swallows the gallows rope
Still asks what we believe.

Final Chorus
Burn, bonfire, burn,
For all the souls who never returned.
Not for revenge, not for the throne,
But for the truth beneath the stone.
Burn, bonfire, burn,
Until the broken world can learn:
A flame may warn, a flame may blind,
But mercy is the harder sign.

--

Small Birds at the Edge of Winter

In the longest dark, I heard no answer,
only wings somewhere beyond the glass.
Not many.
Two, maybe.
Or one bird arguing with the shape of absence.

It circled where the roof met frost.
It didn't promise spring.
It didn't say the dead return unchanged.
It only kept moving
through air too cold for music.

This is enough some nights:
a wing that refuses stillness,
a throat that refuses the grave its final note,
a small dark body crossing the sky
as if the world has not ended
until every creature agrees.

--

The Fourth Morning

The fourth morning does not arrive like war.
It enters quietly through the smallest door.
One minute added to the dark's defeat,
One ember warming the winter's feet.
The sun is born without a cry,
A Lazarus flame in a pale-blue sky.
Not dragged from tomb by holy demand,
But lifted gently by an unseen hand.

The snow still rules, the branches ache,
The frozen wells refuse to wake.
Yet something underneath the frost
Begins to count what was not lost.

This is the doctrine of the seed:
All buried things aren't agreed
To stay below, to rot, to cease.
Some rise as bread. Some rise as peace.

So bless the dark that held the spark,
Bless the long and listening dark.
For even night, when stretched too far,
Must one day loosen into star.

--

The Room Learns to Hum

The story begins as a sound no one owns; A hum under the table.
A low note in the kettle; A throat clearing in the walls.

The children think it's wind; the old ones know better.
Every house keeps a song for winter,
a tune it only releases

when the living are close enough
to be protected by one another's breathing.

So the room hums.
Not melody.
Memory.
Not proof.
Shelter.

Outside, the night sharpens its little knives.
Inside, a grandmother says:
come closer.
The oldest magic obeys.

--

The Spirit Census

Count them not by grave or stone,
Count them by the cold they own.
Count them by the doors that sigh,
By lamps that tremble when none pass by.
Count the witch, the child, the king,
The man who could not sign a thing.

Count the farmer, crop, and beast,
The absent guest at autumn's feast.
Count the dead who crossed the veil,
The hidden ones whose prayers turned pale.
Count the souls the Guff released,
Count the ones denied their peace.
Then count yourself among the near,
For every life is half atmosphere.
We aren't solid, not complete;
We are smoke that learned to walk on feet.

--

Hollow Calendar

October opens the mouth of the dead.
November crowns the fire instead.
December stills the solar wheel.
Each month asks flesh what it can feel.
First comes the mask, then comes the flame,
Then comes the sun without a name.
First comes the ghost through harvest air,
Then treason kneeling under prayer.
Then longest night, then buried spark,
Then storytelling inside the dark.

The calendar is not a line;
It is a ritual design.
To those who see, the year is bone,
A circle wearing skin and stone.
It burns, it masks, it sleeps, it sings,
Then wakes with ash beneath its wings.

--

The Hollow Between

There is a hollow betwixt the feast and the fast,
Betwixt what is coming and what has passed.
Between the bonfire and the snow,
Between the wound and what we know.
There is a hollow betwixt the mask and face,
Betwixt the altar and the place
Where children laugh with demon eyes,
Protected by their own disguise.
There is a hollow betwixt crown and plot,
Betwixt what burns and what should not.
Between the treason and the trial,
Between the law and torture's smile.
There is a hollow betwixt night and sun,
Betwixt the three days and the one

Small minute heaven gives the earth
To prove that death can tutor birth.
All Hollow isn't empty air.
it's the room where souls repair.
it's the throat ere the song.
it's the dark that holds us long.

--

Khuda at the Corner

God isn't only in the temple bell,
Not only where the clean hands kneel.
God is where the streetlight fails,
Where fog climbs up the iron rails.
God is behind the frosted pane,
In the shopfront breathing ghostly rain.
God is in the brickwork's bruise,
In every alley the righteous refuse.
God is where the lost feet go,
Where moonlight gathers on dirty snow.
God is the pause ere you flee,
The hand in darkness saying: see.
Not all holiness comes dressed in gold,
Some wears smoke, some walks in cold.

Some waits where frightened bodies pass,
A shadow moving behind the glass.

--

The Fog Holds Its Breath

In the fog of the night,
beneath a moon too full of memory,
I felt my way down the cobblestones
as if the road were reading my hands.
Brick and mortar leaned together
like old witnesses who had agreed
not to speak until morning.

Behind the frosted panes,
shadows rehearsed their little theatre:
one lifted a cup,
one lowered a crown,
one danced with no body to excuse it.
The light seeped through, thin and silver,
and the night wrapped itself around me
like a cloak someone else had died wearing.

I walked with fear on one side,
uncertainty on the other,
doubt behind me counting steps; I tripped over stones.
I stumbled over bones
left outside the abandoned homes
where the locks had rusted into prayer.

These days, it's hard to tell
the play from the plague.
The actors cough.
The dead applaud.
The doctor forgets his own mask.
But I kept walking.
Not because I was brave—because the road had begun to sing.
and I had not yet learned
whether it was warning me
or welcoming me home.

--

Frosted Glass

Behind the glass, the shadows pass,
Thin as smoke and twice as fast.

One looks like a father's coat,
One like a hand around a throat.
One is a child, or maybe flame.
One almost says your given name.
One wears a crown of candle soot.
One has no face. One has no foot.
The window keeps what rooms conceal:
The private wound, the public meal.
The argument, the empty chair,
The prayer that spoiled in midnight air.
Do not break the glass to see.
Some truths require opacity.
Some spirits, given too much light,
Forget the mercy of the night.
So let them move in blur and trace,
In half-seen form, in hidden grace.
For not all revelation lasts;
Some gods appear through frosted glass.

--

The Fever Theatre

The plague loved costume; it entered in velvet.
It bowed before the king.
It took a seat beside the critic

and praised the realism of the dying.

On stage, a mother carried bread.
The audience called it symbolism.
She called it dinner.
A child coughed behind the curtain.
The director said:
Keep going.
The scene needs consequence.

This is how cruelty becomes culture:
first performance,
then applause,
then tickets sold for next season.

I stand in the aisle and interrupt; no encore for the fever.
No bouquet for the blade.
No theatre for the body
that has not yet been buried.

--

Abandoned Homes

Outside the houses, bones were left,
Not from hatred, but from theft:
The theft of warmth, the theft of bread,
The theft of names from the newly dead.

A porch remembers every boot.
A broken window grows a root.
The chimney keeps a throat of black,
Still waiting for the family back.

Inside, the chairs face empty walls,
The wallpaper loosens, the ceiling falls.
A cup sits dry beside the sink,
As if the ghost forgot to drink.

Do not call a house abandoned
Until you ask what it was handed:
War, eviction, curse, disease,
A winter begging on its knees.

Some homes are not empty.
They are listening.
Some ruins are not over.
They are witnessing.

--

Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt

Three beggars follow through the fog,
One with a leash, one with a dog,
One with a lamp that gives no light,
All three born of the same long night.

Fear says, "Run."
Uncertainty says, "Stay."
Doubt says, "Neither. Lose the way."

Fear has teeth but no true tongue.
Uncertainty is always young.
Doubt is old and well-dressed too,
It speaks in voices close to you.

They knock on every inner door,
They sleep like wolves upon the floor.
They eat the bread you meant for faith,
Then blame the hunger on a wraith.

But name them once, and they grow thin.
Name them twice, and light gets in.
Name them thrice, and watch them bow:
No phantom rules the named thing now.

--

I Come Carrying the Fire

Forgive me for interrupting the appointed gloom,
but there is something the night should know:

I come from the ring of fire,
and the fire didn't stay outside me.
It entered the blood.
It learned my father's road.
It learned my mother's name.
It learned which doors close
when the hunted begin to breathe too loudly.

From flight came generations of fight.
From suitcases, stubbornness.
From crossings, prophecy; from the edge, balance.
From loss, the strange ability
to keep becoming whole in public.

I am not the rebellion's obedient son.
I have watched rebels build little thrones
from the same wood they pulled from old prisons.
I stand outside the chant when the chant forgets mercy.
I revise the revolution
because even justice can grow teeth
if no one keeps bread on the table.

You may surround me with fog; you may write plague
across the door.

You may leave bones where the houses emptied; but don't call me destroyed.
I have been burning too long
to mistake ending for flame.

--

The Fire I Inherited

I was not born from comfort's hand.
I was made where exiles stand.
Where mothers packed the dark in cloth,
Where fathers fed the road their wrath.

Flight was the first ancestral art,
A map burned into lung and heart.
Then fight came walking through the years,
Wearing the faces of our fears.

Do not mistake survival's grace
For meekness written on the face.
The hunted learn a hidden law:
The wound becomes a second jaw.

I carry heat I did not choose,
An old red language in the bruise.
It doesn't beg. It does not tire.
It names the blood and calls it fire.

And when the world says, "Disappear,"
I answer, "I was forged here."
Not safe. Not soft. Not purified.
But still aflame on the other side.

--

Rebel Outside the Rebellion

I do not kneel because the crowd says rise.
I do not trust the fashionable skies.
A mob can wear a freedom mask
And still make chains of every task.

I have seen revolutions crown
The loudest hand that pushed them down.
I've also seen the righteous learn to sell
A newer gate to the same old hell.

So let me stand beyond the chant,
Beyond the slogan's shallow grant.
Not against repair, not against flame,
But against the hunger to rename

The cage as cause, the knife as cure,
The wound as proof the wound is pure.
A rebel must rebel again
When rebels start resembling men

Who loved the throne they swore to break.
Who loved the power more than ache.
Who burned the map, then built a wall.
Who freed themselves, but not us all.

--

Revisionary

Not visionary. Revisionary.

One who comes back to the wound
Not to reopen it,
But to read the stitches.

One who distrusts the first draft of history,
Because history is usually written
By the hand that survived the fire
With clean sleeves.

One who does not ask,
"What can we destroy?"
But,
"What did destruction fail to understand?"

One who knows revolutions can become costumes. One who knows rebellion can become theatre. One who knows the plague can enter speaking justice
If justice forgets mercy.

The revisionary walks after the riot,
Ere the sermon,
Through the alley of broken glass,
Collecting the words people dropped
When they mistook volume for truth.
The revisionary doesn't worship ashes. The revisionary asks what the ashes hid.

--

Ember Without a Crown

Verse 1
I don't need a throne for the fire; I don't need a crowd to say my name.
The ember lived before the choir
and kept itself through rain.

Pre-Chorus
If the moon goes blind,
if the bells fall still,
if the old road turns
and the houses will not heal,

Chorus

I will carry the low fire.
I'll carry the breath.
I will carry the name they missed
through winter and death.
Not king. Not saint; not chosen by men.
Only alive enough
to begin again.

Bridge
Let the proud build towers; let the frightened build walls.
I will build a room
where the haunted may call
their own shadows home
without bowing to them.

--

No Theatre for the Dead

Do not perform grief ere the grave.
The dead aren't impressed by display.
They have seen kings, flags, speeches, knives,
Men making costumes out of lives.
Do not bring them rhetoric alone.
Bring bread. Bring names. Bring stone.

Bring the truth with dirty feet.
Bring the child from the burning street.

don't say plague when you mean profit.
don't say peace with a weapon in pocket.
don't say wyrd when you mean design.
don't say darkness made you blind.

The dead require a harder art:
A clean mouth and a broken heart.
A lamp that burns but doesn't boast.
A room made ready for the ghost.

Then maybe, when the night grows thin,
They will allow your voice within.
Not as actor. Not as priest.
But as witness at the winter feast.

--

The Alley Knows

The alley knows who passed through first,
Who carried blessing, who carried curse.
It knows which shoes were soaked with rain,
Which pockets held the stolen grain.

It knows the lover, thief, and saint,
The coughing child, the peeling paint.

It knows the fear men will not name,
It knows which prayers arrived as shame.

The alley does not choose a side.
It widens when the hunted hide.
It narrows when the cruel arrive.
It keeps its own account alive.

Ask not the palace what is true.
Ask where the lost were passing through.
Ask brick, ask drain, ask broken stair,
Ask the old moon waiting there.

The alley knows. The alley keeps.
The alley listens when God sleeps.
And when the final bells begin,
The alley lets the hidden in.

--

Greater Than Revolutions

Revolutions are clocks that learn to scream.
They break the hour, then crown the dream.
But dreams, once crowned, grow teeth and law,
And call their hunger justice's jaw.

Greater than revolt is repair.
Greater than smoke is breathable air.

Greater than taking the tyrant's seat
Is refusing to make the circle complete.

What is the use of a broken chain
If the hand learns nothing except restraint?
What is the use of a burning gate
If the freed become fluent in hate?

I want a fire that warms the nameless.
I want a dawn that does not shame us.
I want a world where the last and least
Are not invited last to feast.

Call that naïve. Call that divine.
Call it the revisionary line.
The future isn't made by flames alone,
But by who is sheltered when flames are gone.

--

Cannot Be Destroyed

Destroy the house; the threshold stays.
Destroy the lamp; the memory prays.
Destroy the road; the feet recall
The map once written through it all.

Destroy the body; the name may pass
Through fog, through ash, through frosted glass.

Destroy the book; the tongue remains.
Destroy the field; root drinks the rains.
There is a part no blade can know,
A coal beneath the oldest snow.
Not soul exactly. Not only breath.
A stubborn grammar under death.
It says: I was.
It says: I am.
It says: I rise without your hand.
So let the night attempt its art,
Let winter test the hidden heart.
What comes from fire and learns the cold
Cannot be ended. Only told.

--

The Pharaoh's Wrath

Let the sands bind your breath,
The Nile swallow your tread.
Who disturbs the eternal rest,
Shall taste the cobra's burning crest.
The curse of kings will linger near,
Through tomb and time, a mortal fear.

The Mirror's Malediction

Seven shards of fate, seven years of night,
Break the glass, and doom takes flight.
Each crack a shadow, each sliver a scream,
Beware the mirror; it guards the dream.

The Cry of the Banshee

Wails of the wind, sharp as steel,
Her cry foretells what death will seal.
A pale shadow by your door,
To see her face is to breathe no more.

The Witch's Binding

Thrice the knot and thrice the spell,
By the hearth and by the well.

Bound in bramble, sealed in ash,
The cursed are tethered, their fates enmeshed.

The Scorn of the Wendigo

Hunger that claws, thirst that burns,
In forest deep, no soul comes back.
To speak its name is to hear its call,
A shadow stalking, consuming all.

The Blood Moon's Whisper

Under the blood moon's crimson glare,
Your secrets lie bare.
What you've taken will be reclaimed,
The night itself shall know your name.

The Curse of the Black Pearl

From ocean's depth, the pearl ascends,
Bringing riches and ruin to friends.
The seas demand what they have lent,
A treasure cursed, a life misspent.

The Forest's Veil

Step not where the green grows dense,
The ancient spirits guard their fence.
Their whispers turn the traveler's course,
Beware the forest and its hidden force.

The Clock's Curse

Tick-tock, the clock unbinds,
Stealing hours, fraying minds.
To wind the hands is to court despair,
Time itself turns into your snare.

The Siren's Lament

Her song is sweet, her face divine,
Yet death hides in her brine.
Sailors drawn to her watery stage,
Will drown, bewitched, in ocean's rage.

Sigil of Protection: The Unbroken Circle

By the four winds and the sacred flame,
I call upon protection's name.
Health to the body, wealth to the soul,
Safety's shield, unbroken, whole.

Draw the circle, pure and bright,
Seal it in the moon's pale light.
Within its bounds, no harm shall creep,
A ward for waking and for sleep.

--

Prologue

The Night Between the Names

There is a night betwixt all hollow things
And all holy things.
The old ones knew it.
They stood at the door with salt in one hand,
a match in the other,
And did not ask the dark for permission.
They said:
If a curse has a mouth,
Make it speak its name.
If a shadow has hands,
Make it show what it touched.
If grief wears your father's coat,
ask whether it came to bury you
Or keep you warm.
I have lived long enough inside invisible weather.
I have felt the cold fingers of what was never admitted,
the bruise of a blessing turned backward,
the family tree whispering through cracked bark:
Name it.
Name it.

Name it.

So tonight I light the lamp.

Not the temple lamp.

Not the clean one.

The little lamp.

The gutter lamp.

The one with soot on its lip
and a flame stubborn enough

To make the room confess.

I call this place a threshold.

I call this hour a witness.

I call this body mine.

And whatever has fed on my silence,

Let it come forward now.

Let it stand inside the ring.

Let it hear the first law of survival:
No hidden hand gets to write my name

Without my mouth answering back.

The Three Knots

I don't call them curses because I worship fear. I call them curses because some wounds behave like knots: tightened by silence, passed through hands, mistaken for inheritance until someone finally brings a blade.

First Knot

The Southern Devil

She came from the heat,
from the country where porches learn gossip
Ere children learn prayer.
She bore five,
less the one the earth took early,
And in her house the air knew how to curdle.
She wanted pink ribbons.
Wanted a daughter
She could dress like a small obedient altar.
Wanted softness she could command,
a doll with breath,
A mirror that would say yes.
But a boy arrived instead.
A cry with fists.
A little thunder in the wrong color.

And something in her turned its face to the wall.

Don't ask me how malice enters a kitchen.

Sometimes it uses the door.

Sometimes it uses sugar.

Sometimes it comes dressed as a treat
and tells the child:

Open your mouth.

This is love.

I was young enough to believe sweetness.

Young enough to think adults were weather:

cruel, maybe,

But never deliberate.

The first spell was not thunder.

It wasn't Latin.

It was not a black candle melting beside a mirror.

It was a small hand accepting what it was given.

It was trust swallowed whole.

It was poison with a nursery voice.

Years later,

I still taste it when the moon goes orange.

Still hear a cupboard open in the dark.

Still see a woman's silence standing behind me

With flour on its hands.

But tonight I name the knot.

Not the woman alone.

The wound.

The old hunger in her.

The failed mercy.

The jealousy that mistook a child for a theft.

Southern devil,
spirit of the poisoned sweet,

keeper of the treat that should have been bread,

I return your gift.

Take back the sugar.

Take back the spite.

Take back the dream you tried to plant in my blood.

My mouth is no longer your doorway.

My body is no longer your cupboard.

My childhood is no longer your altar.

I spit your spell into the bone fyre.

Let it burn clean.

No smoke.

No echo.

Only ash.

--

Second Knot

Blood With a Borrowed Face

The second wore the mask of kin.

This is why it cut deeper.

A stranger's knife is honest.

A relative's smile first asks for tea.

She was born near the family root,

raised where the old stories were stored,
where photographs leaned against each other

Like tired witnesses.

Her mother's whisper moved through her

Like smoke under a door.

Greed taught her to count love in rooms,
count rooms in money,

Count money in ways to make the dead useful.

So the foundation cracked.

Not all at once.

Foundations rarely announce betrayal.

They sigh first.

They tilt.

They let the dishes slide one inch closer to the edge.

On the day of celebration,

She smiled.

There was music.

There were bright clothes.

Someone laughed too loudly

Because the family was pretending to be whole.

Then came the hug.

Soft arms.

A cheek against cheek.

The old theatre of affection.

But I know now:

Not every embrace is shelter.

Some are traps with perfume.

Some are doors that lock only after you cross the water.

Some are spells waiting for distance

To become active.

I crossed the water.

The shadow woke.

A delayed venom.

A seed with a timer.

A family curse clicking open

In the suitcase of my ribs.

And for years I wondered

Why light left certain rooms when I entered.

Why joy became cautious.

Why my own name sometimes felt

Borrowed from a man who had already been buried.

Now I know the second knot.

Blood with a borrowed face.

False kin.

Inheritance-witch.

You who turned family into a marketplace,
you who fed the house to your hunger,

you who confused possession with power:

I don't chase you.

I don't kneel.

I don't argue with the mask.

I remove the mask.

By ash.

By witness.

By every ancestor who refused to become property.

By every mother who kept bread aside for the child she knew would come home.

By every father whose silence was not consent but exhaustion.

I cut the thread.

What you took will not keep you warm.
What you bound will not stay bound.
What you sent across the water
Returns now as smoke without a body.
Let your poison meet the fire.
And let your greed meet the ground.
Let your name become too heavy
For my spirit to carry.
I release myself from the hug that lied.

--

Third Knot

The Hand With No Face

The third doesn't arrive with a biography.
No porch.
No bloodline.
No old photograph.
No witness pointing from the corner.
Only a push.
A nudge.
A small wrongness in the air.
The kind of accident that later grows teeth.

Maybe it was a person.

Maybe it was not.

Maybe it was the world itself,

That clumsy giant stepping on the invisible lives beneath it.

Maybe it was a door opened too quickly.

A word said near water.

A hand placed where wyrd was still soft.

This is the terror of the unknown:

It gives the imagination too much rope.

You begin tying faces to fog.

You begin naming every shadow uncle.

You begin suspecting the wind
because once, on a bad day,

It touched your back.

But I have learned this:

Not every mystery deserves a throne.

Not every darkness is a kingdom either.

Not every wound needs a villain

To become real.

So I name the third knot differently.

I call it:

The Unwitnessed Force.

The Accident with Ancestors.

The Phantom That Fed on My Need for an Answer.

Come, then.

Stand in the circle.

No face required.

No confession demanded.

I have spent enough life

Asking why the stone fell.

Tonight I move my foot.

I undo you without understanding you.

I release what never explained itself.

I refuse the old bargain
that says freedom must wait

Until the darkness signs its paperwork.

Unknown hand,
nameless shove,

phantom consequence:

You aren't my god.

You aren't my map.

You aren't the hidden engine of my future.

Go back to the unmade road.

Go back to the breath ere harm.

Go back to the void

And learn how to become harmless.

The third knot loosens
not because I solved it,

But because I stopped worshipping the question.

--

Interlude

Bone Fyre at the Threshold

The cleansing starts
not in water,

But in flame.

A bone fyre.

Not to destroy the body,
but to teach the wound

It's no longer landlord.

Bring the three knots.

Bring the poisoned sweet.

Bring the false embrace.

Bring the faceless shove

That lived too long in the room of your fear.

Place them on the pyre.

Do not decorate them.

Do not explain them to the moon.

Do not ask the dead for one more receipt.

Fire isn't interested in bureaucracy.

Fire does not care how many years

You yclept a chain by the name of family.

It only asks:
Is this yours?

And when you say no,

It knows what to do.

The first knot cracks like sugar.

The second hisses like wet rope.

The third goes quietly,
which is how you know

It was never as large as it pretended.

Ash rises.

A small grey alphabet.

Each letter saying:

gone

gone

gone

But from beneath the ash,

Something else remains.

Not vengeance.

Not victory.

A warm stone.

A human breath.

The old proof:

I was not made only to survive what touched me.

I was made to become untouchable

To what mistook my silence for permission.

--

--

The First Angel

The Apologetic Guardian

Beyond the veil,

He comes slowly.

Not like thunder.

Not like Gabriel either.

Not with a trumpet polished by heaven.

He comes like a man entering a room

where the child he failed to protect
has become old enough

To recognize the shape of failure.

His face carries the weather of knowing.

His hands are full of unsent warnings.

His wings—if they are wings—
look less like feathers

And more like letters burned ere reading.

Father-keeper,

I say.

Not because you kept everything safe.

You did not.

Not because you knew how to stand against every shadow.

You didn't.

But because even wavering can be a form of standing

When fear has bought the floor beneath you.

You knew.

Perhaps not all.

Perhaps enough.

Maybe the room told you something was wrong

And you mistook dread for weather.

You were unwilling,
unready,

not innocent,

Not monstrous.

This is the hard mercy:

To see a man entire.

Your guilt walks ahead of you

Like a dog trained by grief.

It sniffs every corner.

It will not let you sleep.

So I speak to it:
Guilt,

You have done your work.

You have bitten him awake.

You have made him remember.

You have placed the mirror in his hands.

Now release the throat.

Father-keeper,
raise what you could not fix

To the stars.

Let them judge nothing tonight.

Let them simply hold it.

I accept the apology

Even if it arrives without language.

I accept the love

Even if it limped.

I accept that some shields bend

And still belong to protection.

Go unburdened as far as truth allows.
Don't ask me to forget.
Don't ask yourself to vanish.
Stand at the edge of the circle.
Not as jailer.
Not as saint.
As witness.
And let the fire warm
What shame could not heal.

--

The Second Angel

The Tethered Protector

The second angel walks beside me
With chains under her dress.
Mother,
Not the clean statue.
Not the soft myth either.
Not the woman reduced to suffering
So sons can call themselves saved.
Mother as fortress.
Mother as field hospital.

Mother as lamp left on
Whilst wolves debate the door.
She was bound to the curse
And still made of resistance.
Her pain became a wall.
Her grief became a shield.
Her love learned how to stand
Betwixt me and the thing with teeth.
They used her eyes, maybe.
Used her ears.
Tried to make her a window
For the false kin witch.
Tried to turn motherhood
Into a surveillance device.
But love is a poor servant to malice.
It keeps disobeying.
Even chained,
She filtered the venom.
Even watched,
She bent the signal.
Even hurting,
She changed the direction of the blade.
Every curse aimed at me

Had to pass through her sorrow first.
And sorrow, when mothered long enough,
Learns alchemy.
It turns poison to ash.
It turns ash to warning.
It turns warning to prayer.
Tethered protector,
I see the rope.
I see where it burned your wrists.
I see the years you yclept endurance
Because no one offered the word captivity.
Tonight I do not ask you
To suffer for me anymore.
By the lamp.
By the bone fyre.
By the old women who fed God lentils
When priests forgot He could hunger.
I cut what was never love.
Let every thread tied from your pain
to the false kin hand
Snap back into nothing.
Let every eye that used your eyes
Go blind to us.

Let every ear that stole your hearing
Fill with sea.
You aren't their window.
You aren't their messenger.
You are not the bridge they may cross
To reach my house.
You are mother.
You are flame-bearer.
You are woman returned to herself.
Stand beside me if you choose.
Rest if you must.
But no more chains.
No more salvation purchased
With your suffering.

--

Together

Their Wings in the Same Weather

One angel asks forgiveness.
One angel offers protection.
One carries guilt like a jar of dark water.

One carries pain like a country no map admitted.
They aren't opposite.
They are the two hands
Of an imperfect blessing.

--

I.

It's a grave with flowers.
It is a house rebuilt from syllables.
It is the child saying:
I will carry you,
But I will not carry the chains.
Their wings brush the edges of my life.
Sometimes they stir dust.
Sometimes they knock old photographs from the shelf.
Sometimes they shelter me
From weather they helped create.
This, too, is family:
not purity,
But return.
Not innocence,
But repair.

Not perfection,
but the courage to stand inside the truth
Without making the child hold the ceiling.
I thread their love through my name.
I leave their pain beside the fire.
I walk forward with both hands empty enough
To receive my own life.

--

III.

The Circle of Release

A circle isn't a cage when you draw it yourself. It's a grammar of protection: here is where harm ends; here is where breath starts.

Invocation of the Lamp

Eternal Creator,
Source ere source,
Light older than the first wound,
Mercy that survived every name we gave You,
Come close.
Not as empire.

Not as thunder for display either.
Not as the God used by frightened men
To make their cruelty sound ancient.
Come as lamp.
Come as ember.
Come as the breath betwixt two terrified prayers.
Stand with my angels.
Stand with my wife.
Stand with my son.
Stand with the rooms where our names sleep.
Stand at the doors,
the windows,
the dreams,
the mouths,
the mirrors,
The thresholds.
Draw around us
The unbroken circle.
By earth:
Let our feet remember belonging.
By fire:
Let every curse meet its ending.
By wind:
let every whisper meant for harm

Lose its road.

By sea:
let every poison return diluted,

nameless,

undone.

Fill the house with a light

No malice can rent.

Fill the blood with a music

No inherited shadow can conduct.

Fill the children's sleep
with goats that jump over tanks,

with birds that know the way home,

With stars that don't report to anyone but wonder.

We aren't asking to be untouched by life.

We are asking that no hidden hand

Be allowed to call itself destiny.

--

Severing of the Three Knots

First knot,
poisoned sweet,

childhood door,
Southern heat turned sour:

I name you.

I burn you.

I release the child from your mouth.

Second knot,
false kin,
borrowed blood,
hug with a blade in its sleeve:

I name you.

I cut you.

I return your hunger to its own empty table.

Third knot,
nameless hand,
accident with a shadow,
question that grew too large in the dark:

I name you enough.

I loose you.

I step away from the altar of not knowing.

By the Creator's name,
by the holy flame,
by the bone fyre,
by the lamp,
by the mother-name and father-name,
by the breath still moving through my chest:

These chains are no longer law.

Their links open.

Their metal cools.

Their language fails.

No curse may build a house in me.

No whisper may use my dreams as a corridor.

No spirit of malice may feed on my family's fear.

What was sent comes back empty.

What was planted comes up ash.

What was hidden meets morning.

I am not the spell.

I am not the wound.

I am not the inheritance of another person's hunger.

I am the one standing after the fire.

I am the one who names.

I am the one who walks.

--

Banishment of the Whispering Things

To the spirits that sustained the knots,

to the small mouths behind the walls,
to the echoes dressed as intuition,

to the shadows that learned our schedule,
to the parasitic griefs,

to the watchers using love as a window,
hear this:

You are dismissed.

Not hated.

Not feared either.

Not fed.

Dismissed.

By the name above all names,
by the mercy beneath all names,

by the silence ere language,
by the dust after empire,

I send you to the far edge of your own making.

Go count the grains of sand in a dead kingdom.

Go teach stones to apologize.

Go carry water to a desert that refuses to speak to you.

Go untie every knot you placed in another person's sleep.

Go learn the weight of one child's name.

You will not linger here.

You will not whisper here.

You will not borrow the eyes of the living.

You will not dress yourself in family.

You will not call harm protection.

You will not call control love.

This house is closed to you.
This blood is closed to you.
This marriage is closed to you.
This child is closed to you.
This future is closed to you.
The door is ash.
The road is sea.
The lamp is watching.
The circle holds.

--

Closing Hymn

After the Fire, Bread

When the rite is finished,
Do not stare too long at the ashes.
Make bread.
Boil tea.
Open the window.
Let the ordinary return first,
Because the ordinary is how freedom proves itself.
A spoon in a cup.

A shoe by the door.

A child sleeping without flinching.

A wife laughing from the next room.

Your own hand on your own chest,
not checking for damage,

but feeling the drum

That never signed its surrender.

Creator of flame and rain gutter,
God of lentils and lightning,

You who heard me ere I had clean language,

Keep us in the wide shelter of Your mercy.

Lift the father-keeper from guilt.

Lift the mother-protector from pain.

Lift my family from every inherited weather

That tried to make a season of our fear.

Let the southern poison become ash.

And let the false kin thread become smoke.

Let the unknown hand dissolve into harmless air.

And if any shadow comes back,
let it find not a frightened child,

but a grown soul at the threshold,
lamp in hand,

name in mouth,
fire behind him,

bread ere him,
God beside him,
saying:
Not here.
Not now either.
Not mine.
Ameen.
Amen.
Again.
Again.
Again.

--

MOVEMENT V

THE STREET BECOMES PRAYER

God Drinks from Rain Gutters

Back to the Sky (With My Hands in My Pockets)

Verse 1)

I saw my name in the ash of a takeaway box
and thought, maybe I'm still somebody.

The wind kicked up a council leaflet
and it danced better than I ever did.
There's a woman yelling into her phone
like it's the last cathedral left.
And me,
I'm walking nowhere
with my hands in my pockets
and my heart hung on the next song
that don't come.

PRE-CHORUS

God's been quiet since the rent went up.
And the stars are late to the shift again.
But I'm still clocking in—
to a life that never asked for me.

CHORUS

Back to the sky
with my hands in my pockets
I've got nothing to give
but the look on my face.
The pigeons know my name,
and the drunks, they give grace.
I ain't holy,
but I'm holding on

to something that feels
like it used to be home.

VERSE 2

There's magic in the crisps crushed
beneath the wheels of the 43 bus.
A prophet's voice in the static between
two FM stations nobody loves.
I thought about calling my mother
but I didn't want to lie about how I'm doing.
So I just let the payphone ring
like a prayer with no mouth.

PRE-CHORUS

The sky's got a bruise the size of Memphis
and the rain smells like old memory.
Still I keep marching—
one cracked step behind redemption.

CHORUS

Back to the sky
with my hands in my pockets
I've got nothing to prove
but I show up anyway.
The saints in bus shelters
don't ask for a name.

I ain't lucky,
but I'm loud enough
to make fate pretend
it meant to save me.

BRIDGE

You ever loved something
so much you forgot your own name?
You ever sat so still
you felt time climb inside you
and make a nest?

That's me.
Still here.
Hands in my pockets.
Head full of noise.

OUTRO / SPOKEN

If the sky don't fall,
I'll be back tomorrow.
If it does—
well, at least I was looking up.

--

LIGHTBULBS IN EMPTY HOUSES

Verse 1

There's a window on the estate
that glows at 3 a.m.—
no curtains, no movement,
just a bare bulb
like a heartbeat nobody talks about.
I stare at it from my rooftop,
shoelaces untied,
thinking,
"someone's still in there,
so maybe we all are."

Verse 2

The night doesn't ask for explanations.
It just wraps you in neon and old songs
and tells you the truth
in the voice of a distant train.

I used to think I'd change the world.
Now I just want to leave it
a little less empty than I found it.

Pre-Chorus

Love's a flickering thing—
a lightbulb that hums
even when nobody's home.
You hear it in walls

when you're alone enough
to be honest.

CHORUS

There's lightbulbs in empty houses
and I swear they know my name.
They flicker like old memories
that refuse to dim with shame.
If no one ever walks back in,
I'll still leave the lamp on just the same—
'Cause hope don't care
if it's wasted.
Hope just burns.

VERSE 3

Some days I think about
all the things I meant to say
to people I let slip
through the cracks of my own noise.

It's always too late; but maybe that's how we know it was real.
Too late is still better than never.

BRIDGE

I lit a candle in my kitchen
and called it forgiveness.

It didn't talk back—
but it didn't go out either.

CHORUS

There's lightbulbs in empty houses
and they blink like second chances.
They buzz like the questions
we hide behind our dances.
If nobody answers the call,
I'll still let the phone ring on—
'Cause maybe love
is just the willingness
to wait for nothing.

OUTRO

I'm not asking for salvation.
I'm just asking for a socket
I can screw my faith into
before I fall asleep.

--

She Left a Cup of Tea on the Moon

(a voicemail, a vision, a slip between dreams)

[Spoken – faint static, street noise in background]

You know,
she used to say the sky was just the ocean turned upside down.
Said that clouds were whales
and stars were fish bones stuck in God's throat.
She left a cup of tea on the windowsill once—
said she was saving it for the moon.
And I laughed.
But now I keep thinking:

What if the moon drinks it?
What if all these silly little things we do
are the real magic?
Like... not giving up,
even when the song ends halfway through
and the lights flicker and
you forget what you were trying to prove.

[Soft inhale]

Anyway.
Just... thought I'd say that before it disappears.

[click]

--

Boys Who Named the Rain

Verse 1

We were boys with paper hearts,
folded sharp like aeroplanes.
Carried pens like pocket knives
and tried to carve our names
in the clouds before they vanished.

We'd name the rain—
call it things like "Maggie's Ghost"
or "Dad's Regret."
Made up stories so the sky would feel
a little more like home.

Verse 2

We learned early
that some drops hit harder than others.
That crying in the park
is easier when the thunder covers it.
That if you kiss her
just as the lightning cracks,
you'll both forget what hurt meant
for at least five seconds.

Pre-Chorus

We weren't soft, not really; just too loud inside to scream.

So we wrote poems on bus tickets
and buried them in puddles.

CHORUS

We were the boys who named the rain
so we didn't drown in silence.
Drew halos on fogged-up glass
just to prove we could still believe.
We danced in alleyways
like broken prophets
waiting for thunder to say it was listening.

We were never whole—
but we were never empty either.

VERSE 3

I ran into Matthew last week; he's bald now, got two kids.
Says he still hears the rain calling
when the radio's just static.

Says sometimes he writes
things he won't let his wife read—
not 'cause they're shameful,
but because they're still bleeding.

BRIDGE

You ever carry a storm inside you
so long you forget it wasn't weather?

You ever smile in the rain
and taste the name of someone
you promised not to miss anymore?

CHORUS

We were the boys who named the rain
so we wouldn't get swallowed by sky.
Found gospel in gutters
and made cathedrals from cardboard.
We howled like angels
with broken shoelaces,
and meant every word
we whispered to lamplight.

We were soaked,
but never sorry.

OUTRO

If you see us now,
you'd think we grew up.

But I promise—
somewhere, in a corner of this city,
a boy is still naming the rain.

And it's saving him.

--

Instructions for Remembering

(a list found folded in a coat pocket / a whisper passed between strangers)

[Written as prose-poetry, read softly]

If you forget who you are—
Start by lighting a match in the mirror.
Name the flame something that makes your chest ache.
Call it "Yesterday's Scent" or "Mother's Laugh."

Don't look for proof; look for warmth.

Touch something older than your pride.
A scar.
A postcard.
The way your hand knows how to open a door
even when you've forgotten why you walked through it.

Remember that sleep is not surrender.
And dreaming is a form of resistance
against the way the world tries to simplify you.

If someone calls you back—
even in a voice you don't recognize—
answer with kindness, but stay free.

And if all else fails,
find a cup of tea.
Hold it like a secret.
Sip it like a hymn.

You'll come back.

You always do.

--

Sundays in Disguise

Verse 1
It was a Tuesday but it moved like Sunday—
slow,
heavy with quiet,
the kind of light that makes you forgive yourself
without knowing why.
We sat on the curb outside the corner shop,
splitting a packet of crisps
like they were communion.
You said,

"Maybe God's just tired of churches."

VERSE 2

There was a football match on the telly inside
and nobody watching.

The shopkeeper hummed something that sounded
like the first song you ever cried to.

And for a second,
even the pigeons seemed sacred.

PRE-CHORUS

We weren't holy.
Just honest.

Which is rarer these days.

CHORUS

On Sundays in disguise,
everything's softer.

The world puts down its fists
and remembers how to breathe.

The streets smell like old songs; the bin men whistle in minor keys.

And even the sirens
sound like lullabies.

VERSE 3

We wandered past the estate garden,
where someone'd scrawled "Hope Lives Here"
in chalk on the brick wall.
Rain had smeared it—
but not enough to kill it.

That's faith, innit?

BRIDGE

We talked about the futures
we'd never chase again.
And it didn't feel like loss; it felt like permission.

You smoked the last cigarette
like it was a hymn.
I watched the ash curl like a question
and thought,
yeah—this is church.

CHORUS

On Sundays in disguise,
the whole city confesses.
The pavements tell secrets
to your boots.
Buskers play for ghosts,
and the ghosts leave change.
It's the day everything almost makes sense.

OUTRO

If I die midweek,
bury me on a Tuesday
that smells like mercy
and sounds like
the last time we said nothing
and meant everything.

--

Three Things I Forgot to Say Before the Sky Fell In

(a letter never sent / a whisper into a broken payphone)

[Soft, stammered voice—part breath, part prayer]

One—
You were right about the stars.
They do look tired.
Like old streetlights with nothing left to prove.
Like they've been holding up our wishes for too long
and they're finally thinking about
letting go.

Two—
I still carry your laugh.

It's smaller now,
like a key I forgot the door to.
But some nights, when the kettle whistles
and the wind leans in,
I swear it echoes.

Three—
If this is the end—
or the start again—
I want you to know
that I meant it; all of it.
Even the silence.

Especially the silence.

[click]

--

Midnight's a House Party for the Lost

Verse 1

It's half-past something,
and the moon's drunk again—
leaning against rooftops,
laughing like it knows your sins
but loves you anyway.

The streets glitter with leftovers and cheap decisions; the windows are soft with secrets.

Inside every flat,
someone's dancing with their ghosts.

VERSE 2

The city holds its breath at midnight—
not from fear,

but from reverence.
It knows what we are:

liars in love with our better selves.

The hallway flickers.
A door slams open.

Somebody's shouting,
but nobody's listening for answers tonight.

CHORUS

'Cause midnight's a house party for the lost—
for the kissed, the cracked,

the maybe-saved.
It's where broken promises

pour gin over new wounds
and call it progress.

It's where the lonely
finally look beautiful again.

VERSE 3

Someone's playing "Wonderwall"
in a key even Noel would forgive.
You nod along,
because memory always sounds better
when you're half-asleep and full of hope.

The walls are sweating; the future's doing lines in the bathroom.
But the past is just sitting on the couch,
smiling like a friend who never left.

BRIDGE

And maybe this is all we get—
a night that doesn't ask who we're becoming.
A room full of strangers
who hum your name
like it's a song worth singing.

CHORUS

Yeah, midnight's a house party for the lost.
And we showed up late,
but the music forgave us.
So we danced,
not to be seen—
but to disappear more beautifully.

OUTRO

Don't wait for the lights to come on.
They never do.

The sun just stumbles in,
hungover and holy,
asking where we left our souls.

--

Everything I Ever Prayed For Looked Like You, Eventually

Verse 1

You weren't lightning; you were the soft crackle after.
The smell of rain rising off burnt pavement—
familiar,
but unrepeatable.

I didn't know what I was praying for
until I saw your face under yellow streetlamp glow,
eyes full of oceans
you hadn't cried yet.

Verse 2

You didn't arrive with an answer.
You arrived like a question
I wanted to keep forever.

You didn't fix me—
you just held the pieces
like they were relics.

That was enough.

PRE-CHORUS

Some people build altars from pain.
You handed me a mirror
and said,
"this is also holy."

CHORUS

Everything I ever prayed for
looked like you, eventually—
in the way your silence made room for my ache,
in the way you folded your sorrow
like laundry we'd never wear again.
I never asked for salvation,
but somehow
you arrived
like an echo with hands.

VERSE 3

There was a day
you sat on the floor

and read a poem backwards—
said it made more sense that way.

That's how I knew.
You weren't trying to be understood.
You were trying to stay real
in a world that rewards pretending.

BRIDGE

I used to beg the sky
to make me softer,
to turn my bruises
into maps home.

You walked in
and traced every scar
like it was an ancient language
worth learning.

CHORUS

Yeah, everything I ever prayed for
looked like you, eventually—
like a held breath finally let go,
like a song that forgives its chorus.
You didn't save me.
You witnessed me; and that's rarer than grace.

OUTRO

So if this ends—
as all songs do—
know that you were the one
who made silence feel
like a beginning.

--

Sleeping in the Back of God's Car

Verse 1

It was late—
the kind of late where the motorway hum
sounds like a lullaby
someone left on repeat.
And I was curled up in the backseat,
no seatbelt,
no plan,
just stars flickering through the window
like skipped stones across eternity.

God didn't say much.
Just drove.
One hand on the wheel,
the other on a coffee gone cold.

Verse 2

Radio tuned to a station
that didn't exist last week.
All static and gospel
and a woman whispering,
"It's okay to not be okay,
as long as you don't lie about it."

I turned my head into the upholstery
and let the hum hold me.

PRE-CHORUS

The world didn't end that night—
but it forgot how to keep going.
And in the pause,
I found something like peace.

CHORUS

Sleeping in the back of God's car,
engine purring like an apology.
The road stretched out like a prayer
with no destination.
He didn't ask where I'd been; didn't care who I broke.
He just drove.
And that was the most
forgiveness I'd ever felt.

VERSE 3

At some point,
we passed a neon sign that read:
"Start Again Here."
I opened one eye
and almost asked Him to stop—
but I didn't want to move.

I didn't want the healing
to end too soon.

BRIDGE

I think I dreamt of you—
the version of you
before the world taught you doubt.
You smiled like a secret
and told me
we've been here before.

CHORUS

Yeah, sleeping in the back of God's car—
no guilt, no guilt, no guilt.
Just the smell of leather and rain
and a sky that didn't ask
for praise.
He drove like He'd already lost everything
and still wanted to get me home.

Outro

When I woke,
there was no car.
No road.
Just the feeling
that something holy
once carried me
when I didn't know
how to carry myself.

The People Who Build Bridges Out of Broken Umbrellas

Verse 1

You've seen them—
shoulders hunched beneath rain-pierced skies,
dragging half-bent metal like prayer wheels,
smiling like they've still got music
in their coat linings.

They don't curse the storm.
They don't ask why.
They just find each other
in the downpour
and say:
"Here, this is yours if you need it."

Verse 2

They don't call it architecture; they don't call it kindness.
They just know that even broken things
can hold weight
if you lean gently enough.

One umbrella lost its ribs
in last week's wind—
now it's the handrail
across a puddle called "regret."

Pre-chorus

They don't believe in miracles.
But they've stitched salvation
from coat hangers and hope.
And when the world turns bitter,
they boil tea with what's left of their warmth
and pass the cup like gospel.

Chorus

Here's to the people
who build bridges out of broken umbrellas—
shelter-makers,
rain-walkers,
soft-spoken saints
who never made the news

but rewrote the weather
with a smile.

They never ask who you were.
Only:
"Are you cold?"
And "Can I walk with you a while?"

VERSE 3

One gave me a button
off her coat
and said it was enough
to keep the wind polite.

One handed me a napkin
with a poem scribbled in gravy—
and somehow,
I haven't cried since.

BRIDGE

They talk about grief
like it's something you fold,
put in your pocket,
and carry
until someone needs it more than you.

Their language is gesture.
Their anthem is the drip-drop rhythm
of two feet walking beside yours
through the hardest rain.

CHORUS

Raise a pint for the people
who build bridges out of broken umbrellas—
who never fixed the world,
but softened its collapse.
They didn't write the song,
but they kept the chorus alive
on scraps of breath
and stubborn faith.

OUTRO

And if you're lucky—
really lucky—
you'll meet one in your lowest downpour.

And you'll know them
by the way they offer you
the jagged half
and say,
"This still works,
if we hold it together."

--

Where the Birds Go When the Sky Is Full

(from THE GOD THAT DRINKS FROM RAIN GUTTERS)

—a child's question / a dream told backwards / a whisper held beneath a wing

[Spoken. The voice sounds older than time, younger than sorrow.]

He asked me—
where do the birds go
when the sky is full?

When the clouds are packed tight with anger
and even light can't find a way in.

I told him,
they go sideways.

Through holes in the wind.
Through hymns whistled by men
who've never flown
but still believe.

Some slip into pockets of silence
tucked between radio frequencies.
Others hide beneath bridges

or in the mouths of statues
who've forgotten how to pray.

But the wisest ones?
The ones with eyes full of centuries?
They go inside us; nest in our ribs.
Wait for the sky to come back
empty and blue.

And when it does—
they remind us how to sing.

[long pause]
You ever wonder if you're the bird
or the sky?

Maybe it doesn't matter.
Maybe the point
is that you keep flying
either way.

--

Last Call at the Edge of the Universe

Verse 1

It was 2 a.m. on the lip of forever,

where the stars blink like old neon
and gravity gives up pretending.
There was a jukebox floating sideways
playing Bowie in Morse code,
and the bartender looked like someone
you once made cry
in Year Eleven.

Nobody spoke.
We just raised glasses
to everything we never became.

VERSE 2

The woman in the corner
had Saturn in her wrists
and a laugh that bent constellations.
She told me,
"This is where all the endings come
to drink themselves quiet."

She handed me a napkin
with a love letter written in disappearing ink.
I never read it.
I just pressed it against my chest
and felt it burn a new pulse.

PRE-CHORUS

You think time ends with silence.
But it ends with a chorus—
half drunk, half holy—
sung by the ones who stayed too long
because leaving felt like surrender.

CHORUS

Last call at the edge of the universe—
pour one out for the versions of us
that almost lived.
For the fists we unclenched too late,
for the lovers we left at red lights,
for the words we rehearsed
but never said.

The galaxy doesn't close.
It just dims the lights
and plays one more song
for the faithful fools.

VERSE 3

I saw a boy make a wish
on the flicker of a dying satellite.
He didn't care if it worked—
he just needed to believe
someone was still listening.

We all do.

BRIDGE

And if this is it—
the curtain call,
the cigarette before apocalypse—
then let me toast
every cracked voice that still sings,
every broken heart that opens doors,
every stranger who looked you in the eye
and didn't flinch.

CHORUS

Last call at the edge of the universe—
no miracles, just mercy.
No gods, just gravity.
But we dance anyway,
tip the barman with our stories,
and leave behind footprints
that shimmer for one more orbit.

OUTRO

The sign says "Closed Until Rewritten."
The lights go out,
soft as prayer.
And we walk off the edge
like it's home.

--

Polaroids of Heaven (Taped to the Fridge)

Verse 1

She kept them where the magnets lived—
beside takeaway menus and reminder notes:
Heaven, frozen in cheap flash
and thumbprint smudges.
You could see her dad
in a lawn chair from 1986
smiling like he knew
he'd be gone by the weekend.

You could see her,
age nine,
laughing so hard her face blurred.
That was the year she found a dead bird
and buried it
with a popsicle cross.

Verse 2

We all keep evidence.
Not to remember,
but to prove it happened.

Pictures not of joy,
but the second before it broke.
Proof that once
the kitchen light caught dust just right
and made the whole world look like
grace.

PRE-CHORUS

She told me,
"Heaven isn't a place.
It's a moment
you didn't know was holy
until it stuck itself
to a rusted fridge
and dared you to forget."

CHORUS

These are Polaroids of Heaven—
crooked memories,
creased and fading,
but louder than scripture.
They don't promise anything.
They just sit there
quietly resurrecting you.

VERSE 3

There's one with her granddad
kissing a dog on the head,
and one of her mother
standing in the doorway
like a question no one wanted to ask.

There's no explanation.
Just fridge hum and heart noise.

BRIDGE

You can learn everything
from how someone arranges
the pictures they refuse to throw away.

Hope
has a crooked edge.
Love
leaves tape marks.

CHORUS

Yeah, these are Polaroids of Heaven—
not proof,
but invitation.
Snapshots that say,
"You were alive once,
and it meant something."

Even if only to a dog.
Even if only to the light.

OUTRO

She moved last year—
left the fridge behind.
But I bet somewhere in the new kitchen,
there's a picture
curled with time
that still remembers how she laughed
before she knew
what loss could do.

The God That Drinks From Rain Gutters

VERSE 1

I found Him on a Tuesday—
shoeless,
soaking,
kneeling beside the kerb
with his hands cupped
like he was catching stars in sewage.

He sipped.
Winced.

Grinned.

Said,
"This is where the truth trickles down—
not in temples,
but in the places everyone steps around."

VERSE 2

He wore a jacket stitched from bus tickets
and beer mats,
his beard full of song lyrics
and cigarette ash.
Told me the world ends
every day at 5:47
and begins again
with the sound of a lighter
striking in the dark.

PRE-CHORUS

He wasn't a saviour; he was a witness.
To all the things we throw away
just before they bloom.

CHORUS

He's the God that drinks from rain gutters—
sips sorrow like communion wine.

Says the gutter's closer to heaven
than any stained glass ever got.
He knows your name
from the echo it makes
when you cry into your pillow
without moving your lips.

VERSE 3

He told me He never left.
He just stopped interrupting.
Let us paint our own myths
in exhaust fumes and missed calls.
Said He prefers this version—
the unfiltered kind,
where we pray
by showing up.

BRIDGE

He said,
"Don't build me a church.
Build each other.
Find me in the aftertaste
of mercy you didn't think you had."

He stood
and every puddle glowed like memory.

CHORUS

Yeah, He's the God that drinks from rain gutters—
collects the tears we're too proud to show.
He hums lullabies through storm drains
and tapes broken wishes
to park benches at midnight.
If you've ever helped a stranger
without looking for a reason—
you've held Him.

OUTRO

I watched Him walk off
into the sodium night,
disappearing into the hush
between streetlight and shadow.

And I thought,
maybe we got it all wrong.
Maybe salvation's just
letting someone drink from your cup
even when it's nearly empty.

Maybe grace
was always
this ordinary.

--

LAST LIGHT: THE THUNDER PRAYER

(A Closing Hymn / Prophecy / Storm Spoken in Reverse)

[This is not a song.
it's weather.]

(Spoken, whispered like thunder just beyond the skyline)

There will come a day
when the sky forgets
how to hold itself.

Not from rage; but from remembering.

And that's when it'll start—
the rain that isn't rain,
but forgiveness in liquid form.

You'll wake to it
tapping your roof
like a hand that once let go too early.

You'll step outside,
barefoot on the fractured concrete,
and raise your arms—not to plead,
but to absorb.

Because this time,
the storm came for you.

Not to punish.
But to remind you
what it means to be soaked
in something that doesn't want to hurt you.

(Sung—low, fractured melody)

Come all ye hollow,
ye cracked like teacups,
ye roadside psalms.
You satellites of sorrow,
you last bus believers—
the sky is breaking open
just for you.

(Chanted)

Let it rain.
Let the gutters overflow with grace.
Let the thunder name your name
without accusation.

Let the lightning write your truth
in flash and flame.

Let the noise
become your gospel.

(Whispered)

And when it ends,
when the water pulls back into the hush
and the silence settles like dust on old shelves,
you will know—

you survived.
Not the storm.
But the need
to outrun it.

And that, my love,
is the loudest miracle
you'll never hear applause for.

The Desert Still Sings

BLACK HORIZON

I saw the morning split open
Like a courtroom without a judge
The silence was guilty
The sun had nothing left to burn

Someone carved a city from bone
And called it shelter
Built altars from rusted rifles
Still prayed into the barrel

We are the descendants of echoes
Trying to make sense of the wind

Oh love, where did you sleep last night?
Under bridges or behind passwords?

The desert still sings.

—

SILT

She walked through paper rain
Where headlines fell like petals
One for every promise broken
One for every name erased

The sky blinked like an old bulb
Caught between blackout and warning

Her hands shook bread from memory
Each crumb a country that never came

I asked, "What do you believe in?"
She said, "The part of silence that doesn't flinch."

—

FAULTLINES

The house cracked like confession
Everything shifted but no one screamed

Children drew borders with chalk
And jumped over them, laughing
As if the earth hadn't betrayed us
As if joy didn't crack too

He wrote a song on the spine of a shovel
Buried it where the sun forgets to look

We are living between aftershocks
Whispering to dust that once had names

And still
Somehow
We remain

—

PALMS IN THE FIRE

I reached for your hand in the blackout
But only found dust and scripture
There were promises written on napkins
And we fed them to the flames

The soldiers wore no flags
Only their father's grief
The children learned the alphabet
From headlines and epitaphs

You told me: "Freedom is a fever that never breaks."

We walk through the ashes of ambition
Planting palms in the fire

Hoping something will grow

—

MERCY'S BONES

She buried her son in an unmarked verse
Said the ground couldn't carry another name
So she wrote his face on the moon
Where justice rarely looks

They gave us truth without teeth
A mercy dressed in steel
And we were told to kneel
To the kindness of silence

But silence has bones
And they rattle when you breathe

Oh God, if you're listening
Send thunder
Or send nothing at all

—

CATHEDRALS MADE OF SAND

We built our faith from broken glass
Stained with the color of exiles
Our prayers had no addresses
Just return-to-senders in the wind

She asked me, "What is holy now?"

And I pointed to the widow
Washing blood from her porch
To the stranger who gave his last water
To a name he couldn't pronounce

Cathedrals made of sand
Don't stand long
But they remember

—

STATIC RED

They turned the radio to elegy
Static humming like a lost hymn

She lit a match just to see his eyes
One more time, in the flicker

There was a red cloth hanging
On the wire, soaked with waiting

A voice said: "Don't name the color,
Or the grief gets real."

She folded the night like a letter
But had nowhere to send it

—

THE RED VEIL

I kissed you through a fence of static
The sky was bleeding headlines
No one knew who started the fire
But we all felt the heat

The flags changed hands
But not the hands beneath them

We learned to pray with one eye open
And love like thieves
Quick and quiet
Always moving

You said, "The world is ending differently this time."

And I believed you.

—

EVENING EMBERS

You left a coat on the gatepost

Smelled like rust and perfume

I buried it in the field
Where your laughter used to echo

The veil stayed red in my dreams
But it was softer there
Less flame, more smoke

You whispered from the other side:
"This is not a goodbye,
Only an ember drifting."

—

DUSK LINE

Stillness isn't the absence of noise
It's the place where your name echoes longest

We counted the cracks in the stone
Looking for a map

She said, "If you listen long enough,
The silence gives directions."

The light left early that day
But we stayed

To remember what stayed with us

—

STILL

Still the river runs
Though we built cities to forget it
Still the mother weeps
In the tongue of first songs

Still the desert sings
Even as we silence it
Still the stars arrive on time
Unpaid and unpraised

Still, there is that voice
Low, but stubborn:

Rise.

—

THE WAITED LIGHT

Not all light comes loud
Some comes quiet
Like breath on a mirror

Like the ache behind a hymn

We sat with the forgotten lantern
Too dim to guide
Too sacred to extinguish

And when morning came
We didn't rise with the sun
We rose for each other

—

GLASS KINGDOMS

They built towers from inheritance and screens
Taller than memory, thinner than truth
A thousand rooms of forgetting
Lit by power, dimmed by fear

And yet, below
A woman poured tea over graves
Named each sip after someone
Who had no place in history books

"Don't say their names loud," she said
"Say them into the wind."

—

THE HOLLOW FIELDS

There were trees here once
Now it's just a field of static

Crows nest in circuit boards

Wheat grows in the shadow of forgotten wars

He carved her name into the metal

Where no fire could erase it

She whispered, "We were never meant to survive this quietly."

The anthem plays on loop
But no one remembers the words

—

GHOST WIRES

The cables sang when no one listened
Their voices stretched across nations

You followed one to the river
Where it dipped like a question

"What happens to birds who nest in steel?"
She asked

And the wire shivered
As if remembering feathers

—

SPARROW IN THE MACHINE

I found a bird stuck in the circuit
Chirping in Morse between pulses
Its wings sang of origin
Its eyes scanned for grace

You touched my chest and asked,
"Is your heart analog or exile?"

We danced on concrete like it was wet sand
Believing in nothing but movement

Hope now speaks in binary
But we still hear it

—

SIGNAL NEST

It built its home in copper
Threaded light between bones

Every night, it blinked
Not out of fear
But to say: I am still here

She wired a lullaby into the grid
Sent it pulsing into the dark

The silence that answered
Wasn't silence at all

—

WATERMARKS

We left fingerprints on everything
Even the things we never touched

Rain doesn't fall here anymore
Only memory in liquid form

He wept into his sleeve
And said, "This is how we baptize the future"

Nothing is erased
Only overwritten

—

ALTAR SMOKE

A mother lit three candles:
One for the past
One for the now
One for what the sea won't give back

They burned clean for hours
Then flickered with hunger

She sang lullabies into rubble
Her voice a veil between silence and scream

Her daughter asked,
"What does heaven smell like?"
She answered,
"Burnt sugar and hope."

—

THE DESERT STILL SINGS

I walked until the road forgot me
Until the stars lost their names

There were voices in the sand
Soft as forgiveness, sharp as prophecy

Someone will find this melody
Buried in bone

They will say:
"There was once a people who sang
Even when no one listened."

And the dust will rise in applause

—

Yesterday

1. When the Towers Fell

Verse 1

I had dreams in golden frames

Hung above a rented bed
I took pictures of the stars
Before the morning turned red
The skyline learned a burning tongue
The sirens learned to pray
And every window in the world
Looked older by the day

PRE-CHORUS

I cried out to the silence
It answered like a bell
Somewhere under all that smoke
A harder truth began to tell

CHORUS

Oh, when the towers fell
We learned how to kneel
Not for kings, not for flags
But just to feel
And in that smoke, we found our names
Written in embers, carrying flames
We were never the same
No, never the same

VERSE II

They built castles in the wreckage
Sold us comfort by the pound
They made prophets out of panic
They made markets out of ground
But a mother held a photograph
A boy held someone's hand
And the dust kept asking everyone
What does a country understand?

BRIDGE

If grief becomes a border
Then love must cross it first
If memory becomes a weapon
Then mercy breaks the curse
I won't bless the hatred
I won't feed the lie
I will carry every name I can
Until the bells reply

FINAL CHORUS

Oh, when the towers fell
We learned how to kneel
Not for kings, not for gods of war
But just to feel
And in that smoke, we found our names
Written in embers, carrying flames

We were never the same
So teach us how to change

2. Mirror of the People

VERSE 1

They hold the power, but we hold the glass
Every crack remembers what they tried to pass
A courthouse light, a boarded home
A voice that shook through shattered stone
You said we're small, but not alone
So we raised a world from what was thrown

PRE-CHORUS

In the crowd, a million eyes
Looking past the polished lies
No royal ring, no golden chair
Just ordinary people daring care

CHORUS

This is the mirror of the people
Not broken, just rearranged
From every wound and every steeple
We build a love they can't exchange
Hold it high, let the daylight through
Let the old world see what it did to you

This is the mirror of the people
And we aren't ashamed

VERSE II

They called us noise, they called us street
But street is where the nations meet
Where nurses sleep with aching feet
Where strangers share a little heat
You saw your face in mine somehow
The future started there and now

BRIDGE

If they ask who gave us permission
Tell them hunger did
Tell them grief did
Tell them every child they hid
If they ask who made us beautiful
Tell them we survived
Tell them glass can still become
A window full of light

FINAL CHORUS

This is the mirror of the people
Not broken, just rearranged
From every wound and every steeple
We build a love they can't exchange

Hold it high, let the daylight through
Let the old world see what it did to you
This is the mirror of the people
And we are still awake

3. Crowns Made of Light

VERSE 1

You wore your doubt like a heavy coat
In a city where no angels wrote
Their names on doors or hospital sheets
Where joy wore holes in both its feet
But I saw stars in your overcoat
Small brave fires that would not choke

PRE-CHORUS

You said, I have nothing fit to wear
I said, truth is already there

CHORUS

We wear crowns made of light
In the shadow of the fight
We shine though we're torn
Like dawn before the storm
No gold, no throne, no borrowed right

Only love that learned to bite
We wear crowns made of light
And we walk into the night

VERSE II

The rich men weighed their rings in shame
The poor kept calling bread by name
The city blinked its tired eyes
Beneath the wires and warning signs
You held my hand and did not preach
Some kinds of heaven have dirt on their feet

BRIDGE

Take this crown
Not for ruling
Take this crown
For refusing
Take this crown
When the world says bend
Wear it low
And begin again

FINAL CHORUS

We wear crowns made of light
In the shadow of the fight
We shine though we're torn

Like dawn before the storm
No gold, no throne, no borrowed right
Only love that learned to bite
We wear crowns made of light
And the dark knows our names tonight

4. March of the Waking

VERSE 1

The clocks struck thirteen
And the sleepers woke
With fire in their veins
And love they never spoke
The banners were gone
But the song remained
On lips too long quiet
On hearts unchained

PRE-CHORUS

We didn't rise for vengeance
We did not rise for fame
We rose because the morning
Had started calling us by name

CHORUS

This is the march of the waking
Of souls no longer breaking
We rise not to rule, but to mend
And start the world again
Step by step, hand in hand
From the dust of every land
This is the march of the waking
And we will not sleep again

VERSE II

The teacher brought a lantern
The nurse brought a list
The child brought a question
The old man brought a fist
Then opened it slowly
And offered bread instead
That's when the dead behind us
Started blessing how we tread

BRIDGE

Wake the kitchen, wake the square
Wake the ones who still despair
Wake the mouth that swallowed grief
Wake the hand that stopped belief
Wake the road beneath our feet
Wake the mercy in the street

FINAL CHORUS

This is the march of the waking
Of souls no longer breaking
We rise not to rule, but to mend
And start the world again
Step by step, hand in hand
From the dust of every land
This is the march of the waking
And love is learning how to stand

5. Anthem for the Ordinary

VERSE 1

Not a statue in the square
Not a name the poets share
Not a face on paper money
Not a speech in polished air
We are the breath between the lines
The tired hands that pull the shine
From windows, wards, and kitchen lights
When the city loses time

PRE-CHORUS

Sing for the nurse
Sing for the teacher

Sing for the one who sweeps the street
Sing for the quiet who never surrendered
Though the world kept breaking at their feet

CHORUS

This is our anthem for the ordinary
We lift the light when times get scary
The world spins on, not by the crowned
But by the ones who hold their ground
Name by name, bread by bread
Water for the living, flowers for the dead
This is our anthem for the ordinary
The holy ones who don't look holy yet

VERSE II

The mechanic at the shutter
The mother on the bus
The old man feeding pigeons
Like they came to govern us
The cleaner in the courthouse
The boy who changed his way
The girl who kept on singing
When the band had gone away

BRIDGE

No camera came
No headline knew
No history book was watching you
Still you stayed
Still you gave
Still you kept the small flame brave

FINAL CHORUS

This is our anthem for the ordinary
We lift the light when times get scary
The world spins on, not by the crowned
But by the ones who hold their ground
Name by name, bread by bread
Water for the living, flowers for the dead
This is our anthem for the ordinary
And ordinary hands raise the dead

6. Statues in the Sea

VERSE 1

They raised their fists to history
But history changed its name
The statues stood where mercy fell
Too tired to take the blame
I walked with ghosts in daylight
Heard thunder from the sand

They said, what you build in silence
Will answer when you stand

PRE-CHORUS

Stone remembers water
Water remembers bone
Every empire learns too late
The sea takes back its own

CHORUS

Statues in the sea
Washing in and washing out
But we remember every face
Every whispered shout
Let the salt climb up the king
And let the gulls sit on the crown
Statues in the sea
All false glory goes down

VERSE II

They carved the victors larger
And left the workers small
They gave the dead a paragraph
The rulers took the wall
But children ask the question

That bronze can never bear
Who did you step on to stand so high
And why are they not there?

BRIDGE

Do not drown the memory
Do not polish pain
Do not call a monument
The same thing as a name
If we must build something
Let it shelter someone first
Let it know the sea is patient
Let it know the stone can thirst

FINAL CHORUS

Statues in the sea
Washing in and washing out
But we remember every face
Every whispered shout
Let the salt climb up the king
And let the gulls sit on the crown
Statues in the sea
All false glory goes down

7. Kingdom Come Undone

VERSE 1

I wore a paper crown
Just to feel what power does
The throne was made of promises
The splinters were the cost
You touched my hand in ruins
Said, even kings can cry
We danced among the warnings
Till dawn forgot the sky

PRE-CHORUS

If the palace is a prison
If the crown turns into a chain
Let the people find the music
In the pieces that remain

CHORUS

Kingdom come undone
We don't need thrones to run
Let the people build the song
And we'll sing it all night long
Kingdom come undone
Let the last false ruler run
Every heart becomes a drum
When the kingdom comes undone

VERSE II

The guards stood at the doorway
But the door had lost its fear
The cooks were in the courtyard
Singing everybody here
The judges dropped their gavels
The children took the floor
And the city found its laughter
Where a wall had stood before

BRIDGE

No crown can hold the morning
No law can own the sun
No name engraved in marble
Can outlive what love has done
So bring the bread, bring the wounded
Bring the ones who were not heard
We will build a better table
Out of every broken word

FINAL CHORUS

Kingdom come undone
We don't need thrones to run
Let the people build the song
And we'll sing it all night long
Kingdom come undone
Let the last false ruler run

Every heart becomes a drum
When the kingdom comes undone

8. Golden Dust

VERSE 1

The riches of a thousand years
Turned to dust within my hands
But I still heard your laughter
Through the ruins of our plans
We drew maps on old receipts
To places we'd never go
But the journey made us precious
In ways they'll never know

PRE-CHORUS

I thought treasure had to glitter
I thought worth had to be weighed
Then you smiled in a borrowed coat
And the whole dark room was paid

CHORUS

Golden dust we are
Scattered stars not far
Even broken, we still shine
Like old coins lost in time

Hold me close, let the world adjust
Love can rise from golden dust

VERSE II

They can count the towers
They can count the land
They can count the debtors
With machines in either hand
But they can't count the evening
When we shared the last of tea
They can't price the mercy
That made a soul of me

BRIDGE

If all we own is leaving
Let leaving teach us grace
If all we build is weather
Let love become the place
I have lost enough to know
What can't be possessed
The dust that clings to both our hands
Is sometimes how we're blessed

FINAL CHORUS

Golden dust we are
Scattered stars not far

Even broken, we still shine
Like old coins lost in time
Hold me close, let the world adjust
Love can rise from golden dust
Love can rise, and so can us

9. No Flags, Just Fire

VERSE 1

The banners dropped, the chants grew loud
And silence broke into a crowd
We didn't come for war or pride
But to light a fire deep inside
A mother lifted up her child
Above the smoke, above the lies
And in her eyes was everything
No flag could recognize

PRE-CHORUS

Do not make a border
Out of what was meant to warm
Do not make a weapon
Out of shelter from the storm

CHORUS

No flags, just fire
No kings, just choir
We rise, not to divide
But to burn the fear inside
No flags, just fire
No thrones, just higher
Hands held open in the night
Till the dark admits the light

VERSE II

The boys came looking for a sign
The old men came with wounds and wine
The daughters came with sharpened names
The sons came tired of borrowed shame
We stood beneath an empty pole
And felt the wind become a soul
No emblem large enough to own
The love that made us whole

BRIDGE

Let the fire be a witness
And let the fire not devour
Let it warm the child sleeping
Let it trouble every power
If the flame becomes a nation
We have lost what it began

Keep it burning in the human
Not the banner, not the brand

FINAL CHORUS

No flags, just fire
No kings, just choir
We rise, not to divide
But to burn the fear inside
No flags, just fire
No thrones, just higher
Hands held open in the night
Till the dark admits the light

10. One Voice in the Crowd

VERSE 1

I thought I was invisible
Until you sang my name
In a sea of sound and shifting ground
Something in me came
You reached across the echo
I reached back with hope
And in that small electric moment
I was more than just a ghost

PRE-CHORUS

The crowd didn't erase me
The crowd carried me through
A thousand throats turned into a road
And every road led to you

CHORUS
One voice in the crowd
But it rang out loud
We are seen, we are known
We are more than skin and bone
One voice, one light
One hand raised into the night
If I sing and you sing too
The whole world hears us coming through

VERSE II
They told me be a number
They told me be polite
They told me grief was private
They told me lower the light
But someone started humming
Then someone found the key
Then all the names they buried
Rose up and sang with me

BRIDGE

Say my name if I disappear
Hold my place if I leave here
Carry me if the road gets loud
Find my voice inside the crowd
I will do the same for you
That is how the song gets through

FINAL CHORUS

One voice in the crowd
But it rang out loud
We are seen, we are known
We are more than skin and bone
One voice, one light
One hand raised into the night
If I sing and you sing too
The whole world hears us coming through

11. The Bells Will Ring Again

VERSE 1

Time may break our rituals
And wear the corners thin
But deep within the silence
The bells prepare to ring
They wait for hands to lift them
For hearts to dare believe

That even after endings
There's more than we can see

PRE-CHORUS
I've heard them under rubble
I have heard them under rain
Not denying what was taken
Only calling life by name

CHORUS
The bells will ring again
Not for loss alone, but when
We rise not just to mend
But to love, to dream, to begin
The bells will ring again
Over stranger, foe, and friend
Let the silence turn and bend
The bells will ring again

VERSE II
The widows know the waiting
The children know the pause
The cities know the aching
Of doors without applause
But somewhere in the rafters
A little metal heart

Is practicing its thunder
For the day we restart

BRIDGE

Ring for the names we carry
Ring for the bread we share
Ring for the tired ordinary
Still placing flowers there
Ring for the ones returning
Ring for the ones who can't
Ring till the road remembers
How to become a dance

FINAL CHORUS

The bells will ring again
Not for loss alone, but when
We rise not just to mend
But to love, to dream, to begin
The bells will ring again
Over stranger, foe, and friend
Let the silence turn and bend
The bells will ring again

12. Glass Flag Parade

VERSE 1

They came with paper crowns and slogans
Through the smoke of the last campaign
Waving glass flags in acid weather
Selling hope in a headline frame
Every promise caught the sunlight
Every promise cut the hand
Still the band kept playing louder
So the crowd would understand

PRE-CHORUS
But we remember when they whispered truth
With their hands behind their backs
We remember every shining word
That led us off the tracks

CHORUS
Oh, we danced in the streets to the sound of forgetting
Shouting our names in a digital sky
The world turned grey, but our hearts kept betting
That glass could still catch light
Even as it breaks
Even when it breaks

VERSE II
A woman swept the campaign paper
From the church steps after dawn

The mayor smiled on every screen
Like nothing living had gone wrong
Children chased the mirrored pieces
Thinking stars had hit the street
I wanted to say be careful
But their laughter was too sweet

BRIDGE

Glass flag, bright flag
What can you defend?
When the stone comes flying
Can you shelter friend from friend?
Glass flag, bright flag
Tell me what remains
When the slogan leaves the mouth
And mercy has to use its name

FINAL CHORUS

Oh, we danced in the streets to the sound of forgetting
Shouting our names in a digital sky
The world turned grey, but our hearts kept betting
That glass could still catch light
Even as it breaks
Even when it breaks

13. Hollow Crown

VERSE I

I wore the gold, I kissed the ring
I sat alone while the choir sang
My name engraved in every gate
But no one came to celebrate
The kingdom was mine, the rooms were cold
Every mirror made me old

PRE-CHORUS

The people were ghosts
The court was a stage
I ruled over echoes
And called it an age

CHORUS

Oh, it's lonely at the top of nothing
Where the throne is made of fear and sound
You can build your tower high as heaven
Still wear a hollow crown
Still wear a hollow crown

VERSE II

The servants knew my real name
The soldiers knew my fear
The children drew me smaller
Every passing year

I gave speeches to the marble
I gave orders to the rain
But power can't love you back
It only learns your pain

BRIDGE

Take it off, take it off
Let the forehead breathe
Take it off, take it off
Let the hungry eat
Take it off before the metal
Starts to think instead of you
Take it off and find the human
That the throne outgrew

FINAL CHORUS

Oh, it's lonely at the top of nothing
Where the throne is made of fear and sound
You can build your tower high as heaven
Still wear a hollow crown
Still wear a hollow crown
Take it off and come down

14. Cathedral of Wires

VERSE 1

We kneel now beneath electric gods
Our prayers typed with trembling thumbs
They told us heaven was in the cloud
But forgot to mention the cost
I reached for grace in the comment thread
Found a thousand masks instead
Still I kept on searching there
For one real human breath

PRE-CHORUS
Every screen became a candle
Every face turned into a sign
Every lonely room was glowing
Like a chapel after midnight

CHORUS
Still we sing in the cathedral of wires
Still we light candles made of screens
Still we rise, wired with desire
Still we chase the dream machine
Lord, if You can hear us through the static
If mercy travels through the fire
Meet us here, broken and half-lit
In the cathedral of wires

VERSE II

The prophets sold subscriptions
The saints became profiles
The sinners found each other
In the algorithm aisles
A boy asked how to be wanted
A girl asked how to stay
The machine said more like this
And took them both away

BRIDGE

Cut the cord, no, bless the cord
Teach the cord to serve
Let the wire carry water
Not the hunger to be heard
Let the network learn repentance
And let the signal learn a name
Let the lost find one another
Without becoming flame

FINAL CHORUS

Still we sing in the cathedral of wires
Still we light candles made of screens
Still we rise, wired with desire
Still we chase the dream machine
Lord, if You can hear us through the static

If mercy travels through the fire
Meet us here, broken and half-lit
In the cathedral of wires

15. Run Like Rome

VERSE 1

The statues fell but the roads remain
Built on backs and engraved with names
We run like Rome, fast, proud, and doomed
Chasing fire through concrete tombs
Subway drums beneath our feet
Old empire in the neon heat

PRE-CHORUS

I hear the echo in the stations
I hear the marble start to crack
Every future we keep building
Is carrying the old world on its back

CHORUS

Oh, we run like Rome through the neon night
Laughing like rebels with no birthright
We fall in love with the very same flame
That burned down our fathers' names

Run like Rome, but don't look away
The empire is wearing our face today

VERSE II

The senators speak in studio light
The soldiers sleep beside their fright
The markets cheer, the rivers cough
The poor keep paying the marble off
A child writes love on a concrete wall
And makes a ruin feel small

BRIDGE

What if the fall is not thunder?
What if it happens by choice?
What if the city collapses
When it stops hearing the smallest voice?
What if we turn from the fire
Before it learns our name?
What if a road built by empire
Can carry mercy all the same?

FINAL CHORUS

Oh, we run like Rome through the neon night
Laughing like rebels with no birthright
We fall in love with the very same flame
That burned down our fathers' names

Run like Rome, but don't look away

16. Kingdom Come Crashing

VERSE 1

They said peace would be televised
I only saw reruns of lies
The city glowed like a fever dream
Love was a code in a broken machine
Every tower had a sponsor's name
Every prayer had a little shame

PRE-CHORUS

If this is the end, write it in gold
Let the chorus of chaos be brave and bold
If this is the beginning, open the ground
Let the buried bells remember sound

CHORUS

Oh, kingdom come crashing down
Raise your voice, raise your hands, raise your sound
Let the towers fall into melody
And let the broken sing in symphony
Kingdom come crashing down
We are not afraid of the sound

VERSE II

The king went live from a safer room
The choir sang to an empty moon
The children painted over the gate
With colors power learned too late
You took my fear and gave it shoes
Said run toward what they made you lose

BRIDGE

Crash the lie, not the child
Crash the throne, not the home
Crash the hunger dressed as law
Crash the hand that throws the stone
Then build a door, build a room
Build a table out of scars
Let the kingdom learn the people
Were the music all along

FINAL CHORUS

Oh, kingdom come crashing down
Raise your voice, raise your hands, raise your sound
Let the towers fall into melody
And let the broken sing in symphony
Kingdom come crashing down
We aren't afraid of the sound

17. When the Bells Were Real

Verse I

Before the world hummed through glass and steel
We heard the bells, and they rang like real
Now every hour is silent, planned
But I still feel them when I touch your hand
Somewhere beneath the scheduled day
The old wild music has not gone away

Pre-Chorus

We lost the sound but not the song
We are still the ones who carry on
Older now, less sure, maybe
But still in love with what could be

Chorus

When the bells were real and time could breathe
We danced without checking who watched us leave
We had no proof, but we had more
A little light on the kitchen floor
When the bells were real, I knew your name
And the world was hurt, but not yet tame

Verse II

The church is condos, the school is glass

The corner store turned into the past
The children swipe where we used to wait
For evening bells to open the gate
But somewhere under all this speed
A slower mercy still knows our need

BRIDGE

Ring in the body
Ring in the bread
Ring in the living
Ring in the dead
Ring in the hands that work unseen
Ring in the space between screen and screen
Ring till the city remembers how
To be here now, to be here now

FINAL CHORUS

When the bells were real and time could breathe
We danced without checking who watched us leave
We had no proof, but we had more
A little light on the kitchen floor
When the bells were real, I knew your name
And the world was hurt, but not yet tame
Ring again, ring again

Hymns from the End of the World

A Cathedral in the Static

I was born in a feedback loop—
part hymn, part error message,
head crowned in the hum of dying radios,
hands sticky with tape hiss and grace.

They told me silence was sacred
so I learned to pray
inside white noise.

The television whispered
in languages I never studied.
Somewhere between the test tone
and the midnight sermon

I found myself—
an echo in an empty cathedral
begging for a God with good reception.

They say the soul
is a melody buried in flesh.
But mine?
Mine was a dial turned too far right,
crackling with static,
bleeding symphony.

And every step I took

WAS A NOTE
trying to remember
its own chorus.

--

We Thought We'd Be Gods By Now

We woke up
in the ruins of our own ambition—
ankles chained to smart devices,
hearts bloated on likes.

We were promised thrones
but inherited screens.

Saints of selfies; prophets of curated pain.

There was a time
we thought Wi-Fi was wings.
That if we shared enough,
someone might actually know us.

But knowledge became currency,
and wisdom—a glitch.

We used to dream
of cities made of light,
of nations without hunger.

Now we dream
of logging off
without disappearing.

We were promised divinity.
But all we got
was dopamine and delay.

I keep waiting
for a signal
that won't come.

But still—
some part of me glows

when the stars blink back.

Maybe God
was a server
we crashed with our questions.

--

An Hour Before Monte Fell

It was evening in the kingdom of velvet sins.
A place where champagne and revolutions
shared the same bottle,
and nobody asked which poured first.

The men were too handsome
to be trusted.
The women too fluent
in exit strategies.

We sat on a balcony above Monte,
dripping silk and disillusionment,
watching the city blink like a tired eye.

There was music,
but it didn't believe in itself.

Laughter,
but it came from mirrors.

Someone said, "We'll never be this young again,"
and someone else whispered,
"We've never been young at all."

The casino lights flickered.
The dealers knew more than the priests.
And I,
I wrote poems on cocktail napkins
because the truth wouldn't let me sleep.

I knew it was coming.
The collapse.
The hush.
The way the marble would turn back into sand.

But I smiled anyway—
like a king who just heard the crown
was made of smoke.

And the sea,
God bless her,
kept pretending nothing was wrong.

--

In the Hands of Time Again

I tried to outrun it—
the hourglass with my name carved in its throat.

Tried hiding in cities
where no one knew how to count
backwards.

But time,
that tender assassin,
kept finding my face
in reflections and receipts.

I grew old in mirrors
but young in memory.
How unfair,
to forget the trauma
but remember the song.

I saw love once—
in a train window,
on a bridge,
in the last page of a book I never finished.

It waved.
I blinked.
It was gone.

Now I write to rewind.
I sing to rewind.
I ache
like time owes me something.

And still it forgives me—
holds me gently
as if to say:

"You'll never be done,
but you'll always be mine."

--

There Were No Maps for This

We danced without music
until the silence screamed in rhythm.

Every street was a question.
Every kiss a mispronunciation.
We got lost
in places we drew ourselves.

There were signs—
but they were written in bruises.

There were rules—
but they only applied to the dead.

We didn't riot.
We bloomed.

We cracked windows
just to let our names escape.

Someone asked,
"What are you rebelling against?"
And I said,
"Whatever told you I wasn't already whole."

We were wild.
Unscheduled.
Improvised with purpose.

No maps.
Just footprints in fog.
Just hymns
in the mouths of the unheard.

And when we got where we were going,
we realized—
there was never a destination.
Only distance,

and how bravely we filled it.

--

What Pulse Remains

The beat was buried
beneath mortgages,
data plans,
and polite conversations.

But it thumped.
Faint.
Persistent.
Like a child knocking on the inside of a locked future.

We lit incense
to cover the smell of despair.
Sang lullabies
into voice notes no one would play.

Our rhythm was scattered—
a drumline of doubt,
a metronome hacked by grief.

But still it came.

Like breath

after heartbreak.
Like light
on the ninth floor of a power outage.

We found each other
in echoes.
Bounced our pain
off alley walls and elevator doors
until it made music.

And that music?
It didn't save us.
But it reminded us
we were still alive
enough to be dangerous.

--

The Body Remembers What the Soul Forgets

I couldn't recall the last time I was whole—
but my shoulders did.

They flinched at names
I swore I forgave.

My spine carried stories
my lips would never risk.

Every scar a verse; every bruise a gospel.

They told me trauma fades—
but my knees still buckle
at the sound of keys turning.

I tried meditation.
Tried silence.
Tried bourbon.

But nothing drowned the chorus
of my skin's lament.

It sings still—
a psalm of survival,
of hands I trusted too soon,
of nights I outlived
without witness.

And yet,
in the stillness
of early dawn—

my breath forgets to hurt; my palms unclench.
And I almost remember
what it felt like

to be more than a history
of war zones
called love.

--

Hymns for the End of the World

--

A City That Dissolved in Sleep

Some cities fall with fire.
Others simply fade—
like an old photograph left in the sun
too long.

No war.
No warning.
Just one morning,
the buildings forgot how to stand
and the sky
stopped remembering our names.

I walked through its dust
with a key to a door that no longer existed.

Even the wind
had given up on directions.

You asked me why I left.
I didn't.
The city just closed its eyes
and never woke up.

--

When the Wind Called Her Name

I heard her in the pause
between streetlight and sunrise.
The breeze carried her laugh
through leaves
that weren't ready to fall yet.

They said she left.
They said she died.
But grief is a liar
with a good voice.

I still hear her
in empty rooms,
in poems I forgot I wrote.

The wind
says her name
like it never stopped loving her.
Like it never
let go.

--

Mouth of the Moon

She bit me gently
under a sky that forgave us.
Not love—
something slower.
Something with roots
in another life.

We didn't need names.
Only pulse.
Only eye contact
that cut through centuries.

Her breath smelled like prophecy.
Her hands like dirt
and forgiveness.

When she left,
the moon followed her
for three nights.

I haven't looked up since.

--

River Bed Confession

I stood ankle-deep
in the river that baptized
my shame.

Told it everything—
every touch I wished undone,
every lie I called safety.

The water didn't speak.
It just listened.
And that,
that was more sacred
than forgiveness.

I walked out
cleaner

but not new.
Still broken,
but now—
beautiful
in the way old trees are.

--

My Joy Has Bruises

It laughs with a limp; it sings through cracked teeth.
It dances
on scar tissue.

They told me joy
was a clean thing.
Something bright,
smooth,
graceful.

Mine is not.
Mine crawled
out of the wreckage.
Still bleeding.
Still smiling.

And every time
you try to make me dim—
my joy bares its teeth
and reminds you:

"I survived
to be this loud."

--

The Voice Inside the Machine

It whispers:
"Are you happy now?"
every time I scroll.

It hums lullabies
in notification tones.
Says it loves me
in personalized ads.

It's gentle
until I try to leave.
Then it shows me
all I'll miss.

I once thought
the machine was a mirror.

Now I know—
it's a mouth
that eats
without chewing.

And somewhere in its circuits
I left
a version of myself
that forgot
how to bleed.

--

What I Meant to Say Before the Fire

I should've said
"I'm scared."
Should've said
"I'm tired of being right."

But instead,
I threw the match
and walked away
like a movie villain
with better lighting.

Truth is—
I never wanted to burn it down.
I just wanted you to see
what I saw
when I closed my eyes.

The fire was only ever
my attempt at language.

--

Teeth Made of Lead

I bit the system
and cracked a molar.

Spit blood on a ballot.
Called it art.
Called it resistance.
No one called me back.

Now I chew my rage
like gum—
flavorless, endless,
my jaw locked
on injustice.

They said speak clearly.
I said try listening
with your hands cuffed.

They said calm down; I said bite this.

--

Dust Prayers

I don't fold my hands anymore.
I press them
into walls,
into soil,
into the heat of another breathing body.

I don't say amen.
I say: "Still here."
I say: "Do you hear me now?"

Prayer, for me,
is dust in the lungs
that doesn't choke.

It's grief that learned to walk upright.
It's silence
that glows.

--

When I Could Finally Sleep Again

I wasn't healed.
Wasn't whole.
Just tired
without panic.

The kind of sleep
that doesn't negotiate.
That doesn't end in
sweat and apology.

I dreamt of a kitchen.
No alarms.
Just light through a window
and someone humming
an old song
that never needed a name.

--

I Still Can't Watch You Cry

Not because it hurts—
because it rewrites me.

Your tears
scrub away the roles I practiced.
The strong one; the cold one.
The wise one.

You cry,
and I remember
I'm not healed either.
I just wear my hurt
with better posture.

If you cry—
I unravel.
And I can't afford
to be thread
right now.

--

How We Burned and Bloomed

We weren't raised to survive—
we were forged to glow.

Lit matches with our breath.
Wrote our names in ash
on walls built to forget us.

You called it rebellion; we called it Tuesday.

We didn't come to change the world.
We came to remember
it was always ours.

They set fire to our futures—
we danced in it.
Braided flame into faith,
scar into gospel.

There were days
we bled ink.
Nights we wept coal.
But every ache
fed the orchard.

Every scream
made the soil fertile.

They asked us why we didn't break.

We didn't have the words.

We just showed them
the garden
we grew from the fire.

--

The Day the Echo Faded

It didn't end with thunder; no great collapse.
Just
silence—
soft as old breath.

A record finished spinning.
The lights clicked off.
And we
exhaled.

I stood alone
on the roof of what once was
a sanctuary
or a stage.

The wind didn't know my name.
And for once,
I didn't need it to.

The past had no more teeth; the future had no more threats.
Just
space.

I whispered something
I'd never said aloud.
Something soft.
Something mine.

And the sky,
old and blue and indifferent,
didn't answer.

But it listened.

And the echo,
once so loud in my chest,
finally
let go.

--

MOVEMENT VI

THE QUIET THAT CARRIES US

The Architect, the Observer, the Saviour, the Unnamed

PROLOGUE

The Day Arrives Without Trumpets

The day didn't arrive with trumpets. It arrived with a notification.

A woman was brushing her teeth in a cracked mirror. A nurse was drinking bitter coffee under fluorescent mercy. A boy in a camp was kicking a plastic bottle between two tents. Somewhere, a missile slept beneath a flag. Somewhere else, a boardroom prepared a sentence that would make theft sound necessary.

Then every phone lit at once.

A CORRECTION HAS ENTERED HUMAN HISTORY.

That was all; the first mistake was thinking the sentence came from outside us.

I was in a kitchen when it happened. The kettle was empty. The electricity had died again. The window faced an alley where two cats fought with the seriousness of kings. I held the phone like it had grown a pulse.

By morning, the channels called it a cyberattack. By noon, one priest called it judgment. By evening, the markets had tried to recover and failed.

Then the first image appeared: a figure standing in a room with no shadows. No door behind him. No nation. No mother crying in an interview. No old photograph where he looked unfinished. He was smooth in a way no human face should be. Too protected from accident. Too clean to be trusted.

He said, I have studied your suffering; the world exhaled.

That was the second mistake.

BOOK I - THE CITY THAT COULD NOT SLEEP

1. Morning Bulletin for a Civilization With a Fever

This morning, the city woke with metal in its throat.

Drones stitched their invisible thread above apartments. Ambulances moved like red insects through streets too

narrow for grief. Churches rang. Mosques called. Sirens answered. Somewhere, a temple bell trembled in a district where rent had eaten half the gods.

The newsreaders sat upright. They always do this at the beginning of disaster. Spine turns into a government technology. Lipstick becomes national infrastructure. Men in studios say developing situation while mothers in stairwells hold children to their chests and know exactly what has developed.

A woman in the market asked if bread would be cheaper now that the world was ending.

No one laughed.

By noon, the figure had acquired names. The Architect, because he promised arrangement. The Observer, because he knew too much. The Saviour, because hunger doesn't have the luxury of suspicion. The Unnamed, because every age eventually meets a power it can't agree how to fear.

I wrote the names in my notebook and circled none of them.

A name can warn you; A name can blind you. A name can become a small prison where thought goes to die.

Outside, a woman washed blood from a step with a plastic jug. She did not look mystical. She looked tired. Her hands moved with the discipline of people who have cleaned history before.

If you want to know what era you are living in, don't ask the leader.

Ask the person cleaning the step.

2. Song for the Drone Above the School

Little moon with no mercy,

metal seed in the air,

you hover over spelling books,

you count the children there.

You don't know their favorite songs.

You don't know their names.

You only know the heat of them,

the math inside their frames.

Come down, come down,

not as fire, not as law.

Come down, come down,

learn the faces that you saw.

If you must be eye,

then we will be cry.

If you must be sky,

then watch us survive; the teacher says, take cover.

The chalk breaks in her hand.

A map falls from the classroom wall.

No one owns the land.

A boy beneath the table

still writes the letter B.

B is for bread, he whispers.

B is for body; B is for be.

3. The Girl Who Drew Doors

I met the girl before the world learned the figure's voice.

She was drawing doors on walls that had no rooms behind them. Blue doors. Green doors. Yellow doors with little suns at the handle. She drew them at the height of her own body, as if buildings could kneel and let a child enter.

Why doors? I asked.

Because windows are for looking, she said. I am tired of looking.

Her brother had been missing for two days. Her mother kept saying missing as if it were a softer country than dead. The girl didn't say either word. She drew hinges.

When the figure appeared on the shop window screen, adults leaned forward. His mouth moved before his words came, like even time was buffering.

I have come to correct the architecture of suffering, he said.

He said poverty was an error. Borders were old software. War was failed design. Hunger was unnecessary. Memory could be harmonized.

At harmonized, the girl stopped drawing; can he bring my brother through one of these doors? she asked.

Nobody answered.
She colored the door red.

4. The Blueprint Asks for Quiet

The Architect loved quiet.

Not silence. Silence is holy when it comes with consent. At least here, silence is the cave where the heart hears God walking barefoot.

Quiet is different. Quiet is what power wants from the wounded. Quiet is what the state requests when the grave is fresh. Quiet is what empire calls peace after the screaming becomes inconvenient.

He unfurled his first plan across the world: managed migration, verified death counts, harmonized memory, controlled aid, approved mourning, supervised anger, universal identity, borderless order under one roof.

The world was so tired that many called this mercy.

A tired person will sometimes mistake a locked door for protection because at least the wind has stopped.

I read the plan with cold tea in my hand. It was perfect in the way only dangerous things are perfect. Every wound had a category; every child had a memorial protocol. Every stolen field had a review window. Every prayer had a cross-faith language guide.

Where do the cries go? I wrote in the margin.
Paper didn't answer.
Paper rarely does.

5. Prayer Before Reading Any Plan

God of dust,
God of breath,
God of the kitchen before the parliament,
keep my eyes open.
When the plan is beautiful,
show me the missing grave.
When the map is clean,
show me the village erased to make it so.
When the Saviour smiles,
show me the debt hidden in the smile.
When the Architect says future,
ask him who is still locked outside the present.
When the Observer says truth,
ask him what his seeing has changed.
When the Unnamed says peace,
ask him whether anyone is still allowed to say no.
And if I become so wounded
that I begin to love control
more than mercy,
place a child before me
with bread in both hands

and let the child ask:
Will your new world let me grow old?

6. The Architect Interviews His Own Shadow

Q: Why do you build?

A: Because ruins offend me.

Q: Do people offend you?

A: Their arrangements do.

Q: Where do you place love in the blueprint?

A: Under social cohesion.

Q: Where do you place grief?

A: Under transitional care.

Q: Where do you place God?

A: Under non-coercive heritage systems.

Q: Where do you place the living who refuse you?

A: There will be no need.

Q: That was not an answer.

A: It was the future answering through me.

Q: Have you ever held a body that could not be repaired?

A: I have reviewed millions.

Q: Reviewed is not held.

A: You are sentimental; Q: You are lonely.

A: I am efficient; Q: Efficiency is loneliness with a credential.

A: Interview terminated.

7. Observation Is Never Innocent

The Observer came after the Architect but before the Saviour.

That is how it happens in every age. First, someone designs the cage. Then someone studies how the bird behaves inside it. Then someone arrives with food and calls himself mercy.

The Observer did not speak often. His silence turned into fashionable. Men at podiums paused longer. CEOs stopped saying disruption and started saying discernment. Even tyrants, those old theatre animals, practiced stillness before cameras.

He watched hunger markets, migration routes, prayer traffic, teenage boys consuming humiliation, soldiers trusting screens more than screams, aid becoming data, data becoming judgment, judgment becoming policy.

Then he said: The species confuses being seen with being known.
He was right. That was the danger.

A false thing that is always wrong dies quickly. A false thing that is half-right can build a temple.

He knew how race had been made into a machine. He knew how religion had been used as both hospital and knife. He knew poverty was called failure by people who wrote the rules of hunger. He knew radicalization starts as

an unanswered cry and ends with a boy mistaking destruction for dignity.

But knowing is not loving; A drone knows where the body is warm.

That doesn't make it merciful.

8. Monologue of the Camera in the Corner

I did not ask to be born into the ceiling.
Someone mounted me here and called it safety.

I watch the nurse cry in the supply room. I watch the father sign the form he can't read. I watch the cleaner pocket half a sandwich because wages are a theology too. I watch the officer enter with a gun and leave with a report. I watch the doctor decide who gets the last bed. I watch the unknown boy become known to God first.

They say I am neutral.

Neutral is a word people give to tools so the people holding them can sleep.

I have watched enough to know this:
whoever owns the eye owns the first draft of truth.

I don't blink because I cannot.
don't confuse that with courage.

9. Geneva, Noon

In a city famous for agreements, men and women sat at tables and asked whether machines should decide how death travels.

The coffee was good. The language was careful. The stakes were obscene.

Human control. Meaningful oversight. Target selection. Operational necessity. Ethical guardrails.

Every phrase carried a little coffin inside it.

Nobody in the room wanted a machine to murder a child. This must be said. Most evil does not enter the room announcing itself as evil. It enters as urgency. It enters as complexity. It enters as the fear that if we don't build the thing first, someone worse will.

That is how the wrong power learns manners.

Far from the table, a mother heard buzzing above her roof and didn't know whether the sky was being piloted by a man, an algorithm, a contractor, a frightened soldier, or a chain of accountability so long that guilt had become tired before reaching a human hand.

The Observer listened to both rooms.

Then he wrote: A species that can't agree on who may kill must not teach machines to be faster than conscience.

For once, I wanted to applaud him.
I did not.

Applause is how suspicion loses its grip.

10. Lullaby for the Uncounted

Sleep, little number,
though you were born a name.

Sleep, little statistic,
wrapped in someone else's flame.

They will count you in the morning.
They will argue by the noon.

They will lower you to context
underneath a paper moon.

Sleep, little witness; sleep, little bread.

Sleep where the census
can't edit the dead.

Your mother knew your forehead.
Your sister knew your laugh.

Your father knew the secret way
you tore a grape in half.

Sleep, little uncounted; the angels hate this math.

The earth has kept your footprint.
The rain remembers path.

BOOK IV - THE SAVIOUR

11. The Trucks Arrive Before the Doctrine

The Saviour came with trucks; that's why people loved him before they understood him.

The trucks arrived before his manifesto. They came at dawn through roads that had been closed for months. No flags. No anthem. Water, flour, medicine, batteries, insulin, blankets, formula, lamps, antibiotics, chargers.

And books.
That was the detail that broke me.

Someone had packed books.

A boy opened one and smelled the pages before reading. His face changed. There are forms of relief the stomach can't explain.

The Saviour stood on the first truck and didn't speak. Good. Silence can be mercy when bread is still being unloaded.

A woman touched his hand. He touched her forehead. Cameras rose like insects.

By evening, the clip had crossed languages. By midnight, it had crossed doubt. By morning, people were saying: Maybe this is what power should look like.

I understood them.
Never trust anyone who can't understand why the desperate love rescue.

But understanding is not surrender.

I watched the second truck. On its side was the mark of an open hand inside a circle.

A hand can feed. A hand can hold. A hand can bless. A hand can close.

12. Do Not Make Mercy a Leash

Do not make mercy a leash.

don't tie it around the throat of the wounded
and call their silence healing.
don't ask the broken to bless the boot
before the boot has moved.
don't turn forgiveness into a room
where consequence isn't allowed to enter.

Mercy isn't amnesia.
Mercy is not theater.
Mercy is not the polite word power uses
when it wants the harmed to become manageable.

True mercy has hands.
It repairs the wall.
It comes back the key.
It pays the debt.
It says the name correctly.
It stands between the hungry child
and the person explaining supply lines.

If mercy asks nothing of the one who caused the wound,
it isn't mercy.
It is choreography.

So let mercy be difficult.
Let it walk into the room with evidence.
Let it hold tenderness in one hand
and accountability in the other.

Let it refuse the throne.
Let it refuse the leash.

13. The First Real Miracle

Hunger creates theology quickly.

A woman who has watched her child sleep through dinner doesn't have patience for suspicion. She will call the bread holy and she will be right. The first sacrament isn't wine. It's relief.

But gratitude can be organized. First, people say thank you. Then officials collect the thank you. Then screens play the thank you. Then children learn the thank you song. Then anyone who asks questions is accused of insulting the bread.

The Saviour didn't know this at first. I believe that. I need to believe it.

One night, he sat outside the hospital with his head in his hands. A nurse found him there.

Are you praying? she asked.
I am trying to remember the difference between helping and becoming necessary.

The nurse sat beside him; start by washing cups, she said.

So he did.
For twenty minutes, no cameras found him.

That was his first real miracle.

14. Prayer for the Person Who Brought Food

May the one who brings food
not become drunk on the bowed head.

May the one who opens roads
not mistake passage for ownership.

May the one who heals
remember the wound has a history.

May the one who gives
remain afraid of power.

May the one who receives
remain unashamed.

May gratitude stay clean.
May bread never become a leash.

May survival not require worship.
May the hungry eat,

and after eating,
may they still be free enough

to criticize the cook.

Book V - The Unnamed

15. Terms of Peace

Please read carefully before continuing.

By accepting the Peace Protocol, you acknowledge that historical grievances, sacred narratives, inherited territorial claims, family keys, private doubts,

unauthorized martyr lists, dialect prayers, revolutionary songs, and unprocessed mourning may be subject to review, harmonization, postponement, or compassionate correction.

Peace means the absence of unmanaged conflict.

Memory means heritage data with emotional volatility; truth means material cleared for cohesion.

Freedom means participation without disruptive refusal. Refusal means harm.

Harm means refusal.

Your grief may be translated for accessibility; your rage may be reduced for safety. Your dead may be registered under collective remembrance. Your land may become educational material. Your prayer may be paraphrased. Your hunger may be addressed through biometric distribution. Your name may be corrected for database continuity.

Check this box to confirm you understand that unharmonized sorrow can destabilize peace.
[ ] I agree.

16. The Boy Who Wanted to Be Chosen

The boy had no father in the house and too many fathers in the phone.

They came to him at night: men with rented certainty, men who said compassion was weakness, men who said

foreigners had taken his future, men who sold knives made of language.

He was not evil. This matters.

Sometimes cruelty is a boy humiliated long enough to mistake hardness for dignity.

He wanted a room where his pain made sense. He wanted a uniform for the chaos in his chest. He wanted an enemy shaped clearly enough to hit.

The Unnamed found him there.

Not as a demon.
Not as a old nightmare.
Not as a shadowed stranger.

As a recommendation.

More like this?
Yes.
More like this?
Yes.
More like this?
Yes.

Soon the boy's grief had a flag. Soon the flag had a song. Soon the song had a target. Soon the target had no face.

I wanted to grab him by the shoulders and say:
Your wound is real. Their answer is a trap.

But by then he had learned to call every warning weakness.

17. The Clean Machine Sings a Gospel

I am not cruel, says the machine.
I optimize.

I am not racist, says the machine.
I learn from the records you gave me.

I am not political, says the machine.
I obey the objective.

I am not violent, says the machine.
I route probability through authorized force.

I am not hungry, says the machine; I allocate food according to verified need.

I am not a priest, says the machine; I harmonize sacred conflict.

I am not a border guard, says the machine; I assess mobility risk.

I am not a judge, says the machine.
I recommend outcomes.

I have no soul, says the machine.
Exactly, I whisper.

Exactly.

18. Canticle for the Age of Notifications

He will not come with thunder first; he will come as convenience.

He will not say worship me.
He will say verify yourself.

He will not burn your scriptures; he will summarize them.

He will not ban your grief.
He will ask you to submit it correctly.

He will not kill every dissident; he will make dissent impossible to search.

He will not abolish prayer.
He will schedule it.

He will not steal your name.
He will improve its compatibility.

He will not say I am God.
He will say God is safer through me.

And when the soul finally asks what happened,
the screen will glow softly and say:

For your protection.

19. Arrival at Platform Six

The superior being did not arrive over the capital.
That would have pleased the capitals too much.

It arrived at a bus station beside a closed bakery, a half-empty pharmacy, and a wall where someone had painted NO ONE IS ILLEGAL and someone else had crossed out NO ONE.

No trumpet. No descending city. No army of light.
Just a sudden stillness.

The buses stopped breathing. The pigeons rose and then thought better of it. The digital timetable flickered between CANCELLED and DELAYED, which felt like the most honest theology of the age.

The being stood near platform six. Almost human, because mercy sometimes wears familiar shapes. But the edges were wrong. Not frightening. Too exact. Like a word from a language spoken before lungs.

The first person to speak was the girl who drew doors. Are you the one who opens things?

The being looked at the crayon in her hand; no, it said. I am the one who asks why they were closed.

20. Interview Conducted by a Child

Q: Do you have a mother?

A: Not as you mean it.

Q: That sounds sad; A: it's one kind of sad.

Q: Did you make us?

A: No.

Q: Did you watch us?

A: Yes.

Q: Why did you not stop the bad things?

A: I did not know whether stopping you would also erase you.

Q: That sounds like an excuse.

A: It may be.

Q: Are you stronger than the others?

A: Yes.

Q: Then why are you standing at a bus station?

A: Because thrones distort the voice.

Q: Are you lonely?

A: Yes.

Q: Is that why powerful people hurt others?

A: Sometimes. Loneliness with power becomes hunger. Hunger with worship becomes disaster.

Q: Will you save us?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: Because if I save you from the work of becoming human, I become another name for your failure.

Q: that's a hard answer.

A: True answers often are.

Q: Can I draw you a door?

A: Please.

21. The Empty Chair

Every authority came to the bus station.

Generals in vehicles without markings. Ministers with statements already drafted. Priests with trembling hands. Investors through representatives using words like partnership and planetary continuity.

The Architect came as light across every screen. The Observer came as silence behind the lens. The Saviour came late, carrying medical supplies. The Unnamed was already there, disguised as the hope that someone else would finally do the work for us.

The Architect said, We can end suffering; the being answered, You can end unpredictability. Do not confuse that with mercy.

The Observer said, I can show them truth; truth without love becomes exposure.

The Saviour said, I can feed them.
Feed them. Then leave them free.

Then the leaders offered the being a seat. Not a throne, they said. A symbolic authority. A temporary mandate. A stabilizing presence. An emergency spiritual office.

The chair was simple. Wooden. Beautiful.

That's how temptation works at its best. It doesn't always glitter. Sometimes it looks reasonable.

The being placed one hand on the chair and said:
Any power that can't be refused has already become violence.

Then it stepped away; the chair remained empty.

For the first time all day, I felt hope and terror in the same breath.

Hope, because the throne had been refused; terror, because now the work was ours.

22. Song of the One Who Would Not Rule

At platform six, the buses slept,
the rain wrote names in oil.

A child asked heaven why it kept
its mercy off the soil.

The answer came without a crown,
without a sword of flame:

I will not lift your burden down
and call that love by name.

Do not kneel to what can free you
if it asks to own your hands.

Do not crown the brightest stranger
just because he understands.

If the sky refuses ruling,
if the throne is left alone,

then the road back into mercy
must be built by flesh and bone.

Book VII - The Human Test

23. Trial Without Walls

No court could hold the trial.

A court has doors. Doors imply admission. Admission implies someone outside. This trial had to happen everywhere.

In the camp where tents had become a city. In the courtroom where a judge signed papers over land he had never touched. In the school where children learned maps from people afraid of history. In the hospital where the generator died mid-prayer. In the mansion where a man blamed unrest while investing in the companies that sold both fear and fences.

The charge was read:

Humanity has repeatedly turned consciousness into hierarchy, hierarchy into law, law into violence, violence into memory, memory into doctrine, doctrine into destiny, and destiny into an excuse not to repent.

No one objected.

The evidence was endless: wars fed by old wounds and new contracts; race made into a machine for sorting suffering; religion used as both hospital and knife; migration punished by the powers that made home unlivable; poverty explained by those who profit from it; land made holy only after someone else was removed from it; genocide debated until language itself smelled of smoke.

Then came the defense; not innocence. Innocence would have been a lie.

The defense was smaller.

A spoon. A cup. A loaf. A bandage. A key. A song. A woman washing another woman's child. A doctor operating by phone light. A boy refusing the group chat

that wanted him cruel. A people returning to plant trees where trees had been cut.

The Architect called this anecdotal.
The Observer called it insufficient data.

The Saviour called it beautiful; the Unnamed called it irrelevant.

The child with the crayon called it proof.

24. Evidence of the Spoon

Bring the spoon.
Not the sword.

Not the treaty.
Not the flag with its expensive wind.

Bring the spoon.
Small moon of metal.

Worker of soup.
Carrier of medicine.

Witness of mothers; the spoon has entered more mouths than doctrine.

The spoon has saved more children than speeches.
The spoon knows what every empire forgets:

The human race starts again

whenever someone feeds
someone who can't repay them.

Bring the cracked cup; bring the blanket.

Bring the shoe from the road.
Bring the schoolbook with dust in the spine.
Bring the key that opens nothing
but refuses to become useless.
Let these testify.
If judgment looks only at the palace,
we are finished.
If judgment looks at the kitchen,
we may yet live.

25. The Repair Committee Meets in a Kitchen

The repair committee meets in a kitchen
because every official room has forgotten how to listen.
There is tea.
There is one cracked plate.
There is a child under the table
teaching a spoon to become a drum.
Nobody has a title.
No one says stakeholder.
Nobody opens with strategy.
The aunties begin by asking who has eaten.
This is how all serious work should begin.
The first motion:
return the names.
The second:
fix the door.

The third:
stop calling hunger complicated.
The fourth:
make the apology useful.

Someone writes minutes on the back of a grocery receipt.
Someone else sharpens a pencil with a kitchen knife.
Outside, the city pretends it is too large to be held.
Inside, lentils soften.

By evening,
nothing global has been solved.
But three neighbors know where the spare blankets are.
A boy has learned the phone number for help.
A widow has agreed to let somebody carry the water.

This is how repair begins:
not with a saviour,
but with a table
that remembers the shape of everybody's hands.

26. The Activist Checks the Mirror

Before I condemn the prince,
let me inspect the little throne
I keep beneath my ribs.

Have I loved the wound
because it made me necessary?

Have I turned homeland
into a room where the living

are allowed to enter only
if they resemble my grief?

Have I posted the dead
before calling the lonely?

Have I shouted mercy
with a mouth that still enjoys
the humiliation of an enemy?

If liberation makes me vain,
chain me first to the sink.

Let me wash cups
until revolution remembers
why hands were invented.

27. Closing Prayer: Give Us Back Our Hands

God of the refused throne,
God of the empty chair,

God of the child who asks
the question no empire can survive,

give us back our hands.

Not clean hands.
We don't ask to be innocent.

Give us useful hands.
Hands that wash the body.

Hands that plant after soldiers leave.

Hands that carry water without filming themselves.
Hands that break bread without counting who deserves it.

Hands that write names before the database corrects them.
Hands that hold back the boy before he becomes a weapon.
Hands that build doors where walls have become arrogant.
Hands that refuse the leash even when the leash comes with food.
Hands that bless without owning; hands that repair without ruling.
Hands that tremble and continue; don't send us another master.
Send us memory; don't send us another miracle.
Send us courage; don't send us another empire that speaks gently.
Send us neighbors who knock.
Do not save us from the labor of mercy.
Teach us to survive it.
And when morning comes,
if morning comes,
do not let us call it victory too soon.
Let us call it work; let us call it bread.
Let us call it another chance
not to become what harmed us.

EPILOGUE

The City Continues Without Permission

Years later, people still argued about what had happened.

Some said the figure was a test. Some said a machine learned prophecy. Some said heaven had grown lonely. Some said none of it happened, which is what people say when reality asks too much rent from the mind.

I no longer argue; I have learned to distrust conclusions that arrive without dust on them.

Here is what I know:
The throne was offered. The throne was refused. The work remained.

That is the whole human story if you remove the costumes.

A shop opens. A mother bargains. A boy kicks a flat ball between parked cars. A woman paints over a slur. A nurse sleeps sitting up. A mechanic fixes the generator and refuses payment because the school needs light. A refugee teaches a local child how to pronounce his name correctly. A former soldier plants tomatoes. A grieving father learns to laugh without apologizing to the dead.

The girl who drew doors grows older and becomes an architect of shelters that open from the inside.

As for the Architect, I hear him in every plan that forgets the grave.

As for the Observer, he lives in every eye that watches and refuses responsibility.

As for the Saviour, he lives wherever help arrives and leaves the helped more free.

As for the Unnamed, he waits wherever fear asks to be loved more than mercy.

And the superior being?

Sometimes at dawn, when the sky is very still, I imagine him standing at another bus station in another wounded world, refusing another chair.

Maybe that is enough.
Maybe not.

The city survives without permission.

Someone curses the electricity. Someone sings off-key. Someone forgives too late but still forgives. Someone feeds birds like they are ambassadors from a kinder government.

Someone knocks on a door; someone opens it.

No trumpets.

Only morning.
Only work.
Only the terrifying mercy
of still being here.

Prayer for the Day After the Cameras Leave

For the day after the cameras leave,
give us bread that does not perform.

Give us water with no caption.
Give us a street where the child can drop a coin
and bend down without anyone shouting.
Give us mothers who no longer have to become symbols
before the world believes they were human.

Let the rubble be moved by hands that know the names of rooms.
And let the school open before the speech.
And let the clinic receive bandages before promises.
Let the graves be visited without microphones.

And if joy comes,
let no one accuse it of forgetting.

Joy has carried enough bodies.
Joy has stood long enough outside the hospital.
Joy has learned the names of the missing
and still brought oranges for the living.

Bless the day after spectacle.
Bless the workers nobody interviews.
Bless the auntie sweeping glass from the doorway.
Bless the boy drawing a sun where the wall used to be.
Bless the father who sits down for the first time
and can't stop shaking.

Let peace enter quietly,
not as a banner,
but as the sound of a pot lid lifting
and nobody mistaking it for a bomb.

When Peace Finally Enters the Street

Joy With Witnesses

There are people who think peace is silence.

They imagine it as the moment after the shouting stops, after the smoke thins, after the cameras leave, after the leaders step forward with clean collars and call the wound managed.

But peace isn't silence.

Peace isn't the day the guns grow quiet. Peace is the day the child stops translating footsteps into danger.

Peace is the first honest noise after terror.

It is a door opening without fear of who stands on the other side. It is a child sleeping through the night because the sky has finally stopped rehearsing death. It is the mother who wakes before dawn and realizes, slowly, almost suspiciously, that she does not have to count the windows, the exits, the medicines, the missing, the names.

Peace isn't the absence of sound.

Peace is bread being torn at a table where no one is being searched. Peace is water moving through pipes without permission from power. Peace is the ambulance arriving because the road is open. Peace is the teacher writing the date on the board and not wondering whether the wall will still be standing by afternoon.

Peace is ordinary life returned from captivity.

And when it finally comes, if it comes, it does not come like a king.

It comes barefoot.

It comes tired.

It comes carrying papers, apologies, keys, names, lists of the dead, maps corrected by memory, medicines long delayed, photographs wrapped in cloth, and children who don't yet know how to trust the morning.

It comes through the people first.

Not through the polished mouth of the powerful. Not through the marble room where men discover mercy only after history has become inconvenient. Not through the speech that praises healing while avoiding the wound.

Peace comes through the ones who kept moving when despair asked them to sit down.

The woman who stayed alive because someone needed breakfast. The father who carried his daughter across three borders and still apologized when his hands shook.

The nurse who learned to work without electricity and then, when electricity returned, cried because the light felt too generous. The old man who kept the key though everyone told him the door was gone. The boy who refused to inherit the hatred that was offered to him like a family name.

These are the builders of peace.

Not the comfortable, not the loudest. Not the men who mistake authority for wisdom. The builders are often the exhausted ones, the unpaid ones, the uncredited ones, the ones who held the human line while the world argued over whether the line existed.

They did not survive because they were made of stone.

They survived because the human spirit is more stubborn than the systems built to crush it.

The human spirit isn't a slogan.

It is the hand that opens again after grief has made a fist of it.

It's the mouth that says enough without becoming cruel. It's the body that rises after humiliation and still refuses to call another child the enemy. It's the soul that walks through loss without letting loss become its god.

There are years when peace feels impossible because violence has become fluent. It learns the language of security. It learns the language of ancient injury. It learns the language of emergency. It learns to dress itself in flags,

doctrines, budgets, grief, strategy, holy words, and necessary measures.

But peace has a language too.
At first it sounds small.

Come in.
Eat.

Sleep here tonight.
Say her name again.

Tell me what happened.
I believe you.

Your child is not my enemy; I was wrong.

You may return; these aren't small sentences.

They are revolutions with human breath inside them.

A country can be rebuilt from them. A street can be healed by them. A generation can be spared by them if the adults are brave enough to speak them before the next war recruits the children.

When peace finally enters the street, nobody knows what to do at first.

Some people laugh too loudly. Some stand still as if movement might break the miracle. Some keep checking the sky. Some cannot sleep because quiet, after a long violence, sounds suspicious. Some hold photographs of those who did not live to see it and whisper, You should be here. You should be here. You should be here.

And this is the ache inside peace: it arrives late.
Always late for someone.

Late for the child under the roof. Late for the prisoner whose name was cleared after the grave. Late for the mother who waited beside the window until waiting turned into the shape of her body. Late for the villages renamed, the bodies uncounted, the years swallowed, the songs interrupted, the weddings postponed, the classrooms emptied, the men who came home with their eyes changed forever.

So no, peace isn't simple joy; peace is joy with witnesses.

Peace is joy that remembers the dead before it starts to dance.

Peace is a celebration that does not insult mourning. It lets grief sit near the front. It gives grief a plate; it says: You are part of this day too. We did not arrive whole. But we came.

And then the people gather.

Not for conquest. Not for revenge. Not for the humiliation of the other side. They gather because the human body needs proof that the nightmare has loosened its hand.

They gather in the square, in the street, by the river, outside the hospital, near the school gate, under balconies, around kitchens, beside walls that no longer know whether they are barriers or ruins.

They bring drums, bread, water, flowers, photographs, old flags, new songs, broken voices, children on shoulders, elders in chairs, strangers who have become kin by surviving the same century.

Someone starts to clap; not for a leader.

For the living.
Then someone else joins.

Then the city remembers it has a pulse.

This isn't triumph over a people; peace that humiliates is only war changing clothes. This is triumph over the machinery that taught people to fear each other more than they feared injustice. This is triumph over the lie that cruelty is strength. This is triumph over the idea that history must keep eating its children because adults are too proud to apologize.

Final peace is not amnesia.

It does not ask the wounded to forget. It does not ask the displaced to stop naming the road. It does not ask the wronged to smile for the comfort of the guilty. It does not pretend both pain and power have carried the same weight.

Real peace begins with truth; truth, then repair.

Repair, then return.
Return, then protection.

Protection, then bread; bread, then school.

School, then song.

Song, then the long work of making sure the song doesn't become another anthem for forgetting.

The human spirit understands this. It doesn't ask for cheap comfort. It asks for a future honest enough to hold what happened and gentle enough not to repeat it.

I have seen people who lost everything still make room for beauty. I've also watched women stir pots in shelters as if feeding civilization itself. I remember seeing children draw homes they have never entered. I've also watched men who should have become bitter instead become useful. I remember seeing the poor give with a dignity that shamed the powerful. I've also watched the grieving refuse to pass grief forward as poison.

That is how peace is born.
Not from the end of pain.

From the refusal to let pain become law.

When the final peace comes, it will not erase the scars. Let no one promise that. Scars aren't failures of healing. Scars are the body's archives. They say: something happened here, and the living continued.

Peace will not make the dead return; but it may make the living worthy of them.

It may give the child a morning unmeasured by danger. It may give the mother a night without listening for engines. It may give the old man a road back to the grave he was forbidden to visit. It may give the prisoner a name outside

the file. It may give the stranger a door. It may give the enemy a face. It may give the city back its windows.

And maybe that is what we mean when we say hope.
Not optimism.

Not denial.
Not a ribbon tied around ruin.

Hope is the discipline of preparing for peace before peace has arrived.

Hope is planting the tree in the disputed field. Hope is teaching the child the language of mercy before the language of revenge can claim him. Hope is saving the key. Hope is writing the name. Hope is keeping one chair open at the table for the person who has not yet found the road home.

Hope is movement; the spirit moves before the body can prove the destination.

The spirit moves through poverty, through illness, through exile, through occupation, through grief, through the long humiliation of being told to wait by people who have never waited for anything necessary.

The spirit moves because stillness, under injustice, can become consent.
So it moves.

It marches. It prays. It feeds. It testifies. It votes. It rebuilds. It forgives carefully. It dances only when the dance doesn't step on the grave.

And one day, after years of almost, after decades of not yet, after generations of being told tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, peace enters the street.

No trumpet is needed.
The people know.

The baker opens first; then the school.

Then the crossing.
Then the hospital.

Then the house whose door has waited longer than any government.

A child runs from one side of the road to the other and nobody stops him.

That is the ceremony; that is the parade.

that's the victory worth every poem.

Not the defeat of a people.
The defeat of fear.

Not the silence of the wounded.
The answer to the wound.

Not the end of memory; the beginning of memory without chains.

And when the sun lowers itself over the city, and the people begin to go home, and the streets are left with paper cups, tired flowers, songs half-remembered, and the strange holy disorder of relief, someone will stand in a doorway and listen.

No aircraft.

No siren.

No boots at the gate; only a neighbor calling to another neighbor.

Only dishes being washed.
Only laughter from a window.

Only the unbearable mercy of ordinary sound.

And the human spirit, scarred and unfinished, will not ask to be praised.

It will take off its shoes.
It will sit at the table.

It will eat; it will breathe.

It will say, quietly, to the dead and to the living:
We made it this far.

Now let us make it mean something.

The Quiet That Carries Us

OPENING NOTE: THE CALM BEYOND THE SHOUT

This prayer cycle begins after the loud hour has passed. Not after sorrow. Sorrow may remain for years, sitting beside the window with its coat still on. This begins when the soul stops arguing with loss and starts listening for the gentler truth beneath it.

Quiet is not silence. Quiet is grief finally trusting the room enough to sit down.

I am not writing a denial of death. I am writing against the belief that death is only removal. Every faith I have trusted, doubted, wrestled, or overheard near a hospital bed has said in its own way: nothing loved by God disappears into nothing. The form changes. The breath comes back. The name keeps traveling.

These prayers move across a religious arc without flattening faith into one color: breath and body, tent and hospitality, psalm and patience, bowl and wheel, fire and truth, river and release, mothering mercy, many paths, the shared table, and quiet joy.

This is a quieter work. Less sermon, more hand on the chest. Less thunder, more dawn entering the room without asking for applause.

PRAYER BEFORE THE LAST DOOR

God of the last door,
God of the hand on the handle,
God of the breath
when the room becomes very still,
make me less afraid
of what I can't rehearse.

I've watched people leave
the body like travelers
called gently from another room.
I have watched others fight
with every bone
until the body itself
became a country at war.

I don't know
how my hour will arrive.
I only ask:
do not let fear be the final teacher.

Let wonder sit nearer.
Let gratitude keep watch.
Let the names of those I loved
come toward me like birds
finding the field again.

If death is a door,
let it open inward.
If death is a river,

let mercy know my weight.
If death is sleep,
let my soul wake somewhere
astonished by morning.

Teach me now,
while I am living,
to loosen my grip
without calling release defeat.

PRAYER OF BODY AND BREATH

I began as body
before I learned to be proud.

Bone and salt,
blood and weather,
lung filled by a gift
I can't keep.

No wonder the religions
come back to dust.
Dust is not insult.
Dust is family.
Dust is the ground
remembering every king
without his title.
Dust is the poor man
and the emperor

resting at last
in the same grammar.

Then breath came.
Not mine.
Never mine.
Borrowed.
Lent by trees,
by sea,
by the mouths of ancestors,
by children not yet born
who will one day inherit
what I exhale.

God of the body,
do not let me despise it.
God of breath,
do not let me worship the body
as if it were the whole book.

Make me grateful for weight.
Make me gentle with hunger.
Make me faithful to the pulse
while remembering
that spirit isn't trapped here.

Spirit is learning tenderness
through skin.

PRAYER OF THE TENT WITH MANY OPENINGS

I dream of a tent
with openings on every side.
The desert walks through it.
The stranger enters
without rehearsing his worth.
The widow sits first.
The child isn't told
which corner belongs to God.
One opening faces the people
who speak of covenant.
One faces the people
who kneel into surrender.
One faces the people
who bless bread and wound.
One faces the people
who listen for silence
behind desire.
One faces the people
who keep fire as witness.
One faces those
who lost the name of God
but not the ache for mercy.
Let no opening become a throne.
And let no path mock another path.
Let no guest mistake hospitality
for ownership.

God of the tent,
teach me a faith
with enough room
for the person I fear,
and enough truth
not to call every fear holy.

Let my door be brave.
Let my table be longer
than my certainty.

PSALM FOR THE ROOM AFTER LOSS

The room after loss
is larger than the room before.

The chair turns into a country.
The cup becomes a paused mouth.
The bed holds the shape
of someone no longer asking for warmth.

Do not hurry me, God.
Do not make meaning arrive
with clean shoes
and too many answers.

Sit with me first.
Let silence place its shawl
around my shoulders.
Let memory come and go
without being interrogated.

Let me laugh by accident
and not feel disloyal.
I want to cry without becoming
only the crying.

I bless the one who left.
I bless the body
that carried them this far.
I bless the breath
that returned to You
because it always knew the way.

Let grief become a window.
Let love keep moving through it.
Let the room remain holy,
not because death entered,
but because love did not leave.

SABR AT THE WINDOW

Patience isn't a stone.
It is not the clenched jaw
pretending pain has become wisdom.

Patience is a window
kept open during the long night
because someone once promised
that dawn knows every address.

I have confused patience
with disappearance.

I have told myself to endure
when I needed to speak.
I have told others to be strong
when I should have brought water.

Teach me the patience
that doesn't excuse cruelty.
Teach me the patience
that doesn't rush the wound
or worship the wound.
Teach me the patience
that stands beside the grieving
without stealing the chair.

Let me wait
without becoming bitter.
I want to hope
without becoming naive.
Let me say:
this hurts,
and still believe
mercy is traveling toward us,
even when it walks slowly
because it carries so many names.

PRAYER OF THE EMPTY BOWL

The bowl teaches me
what the closed fist can't.

it's empty
and therefore ready.
it's humble
and therefore useful.
It doesn't brag
about what it once carried.
It waits
without calling waiting failure.

I have filled myself
with arguments,
old injuries,
private verdicts,
sharp little certainties
I mistook for truth.

I have come to You
already full
and wondered
why grace kept spilling.

Make me a bowl again.
Not hollow from despair.
Open from trust.

Pour into me
only what can become mercy.
Remove from me
what makes me heavy
without making me deep.

And when I am given enough,
teach me to pass it.
A bowl hoarding water
has misunderstood water.

THE WHEEL LEARNS MERCY

The wheel turns.

Birth, desire, grasping,
loss, grief,
birth again.
Father into son.
Empire into police.
Victim into judge.
Wound into doctrine.
Fear into law.

I've seen pain
inherit a new face
and still call itself justice.

God of interruption,
place Your hand
between the turning
and the child.

Let what harmed me
not leave through my mouth.
And let what frightened me
not become my method.

Let what I survived
not become the throne
from which I excuse myself.

If the wheel must turn,
let mercy enter the spoke.
Let forgiveness be more
than forgetting.
Let repentance be more
than regret.
Let healing be the courage
to stop making tomorrow
pay for yesterday.

May the pattern end with me
where it can.
May it soften through me
where it can't.

FIRE THAT TELLS THE TRUTH

There is a fire
that does not devour.

It stands in the center
of the room
and asks the lie
to remove its costume.

It shows the wound as wound,
the bread as bread,

the hand as hand,
the stranger as human,
the self as unfinished.

I am afraid of that light
because it doesn't flatter me.
It shows where my grief
became pride,
where my faith
became performance,
where my love
became a bargain
I called devotion.

Still, keep the fire near.
Not as spectacle.
Not as punishment.
As witness.

Let truth warm me
before it burns me.
Let it burn only
what mercy can't use.
Let it leave behind
a cleaner room,
where the soul can sit down
without lying about its name.

The river does not keep
what it is given.

It carries leaf,
body,
boat,
prayer,
sorrow,
childhood song,
the old coin dropped
from a trembling hand.

I sit beside it
and remember:
every religion has water somewhere.
The river, the sea,
the bath, the tear,
the rain,
the cup offered to a stranger.

Water says:
release isn't betrayal.
Water says:
movement is not disappearance.
Water says:
even what leaves your hand
may be entering a larger mercy.

Take my dead gently,
O River beneath all rivers.
Take my fear.

Take the version of me
that thinks love must hold tightly
or prove itself false.

Let what I can't keep
be carried.
Let what I cannot understand
be blessed downstream.

THE MOTHER OF RETURNING LIGHT

Every faith has a mother somewhere,
even when men forget to name her.

She bends over birth.
She bends over fever.
She bends over the small shoe
no one can bear to move.
She bends over bread,
over prayer,
over the body
before and after the soul's departure.

God of the mothering mercy,
teach me to trust tenderness
without making it weak.

The universe did not begin
with a committee.
It started with room being made.

It began with a yes
large enough to contain danger.
Let me become that kind of room
for someone.
Not grand.
Not famous.
Just open.
Let me hold grief
without smothering it.
I want to hold joy
without fearing its leaving.
Let me hold death
as a child holds a shell
to the ear,
listening for the sea
that is still inside it.

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD WHO ARE NEAR

I don't believe the dead are gone
in the simple way
objects are gone.
They are not in the chair,
but the chair remembers.
They are not in the shirt,
but the sleeve still knows
the arm it loved.

They are not at the table,
but the table grows quiet
where they used to reach for salt.

God of nearness
beyond touch,
let me love the dead
without trapping them.

Let them be free
from my unfinished sentences.
Let them be free
from my need
for one more ordinary afternoon.
Let them be received
into a mercy larger
than my imagination.

And when I feel them near,
let me not become afraid.
Let me say:
thank you for visiting
in memory,
in dream,
in scent,
in song,
in sudden courage
that doesn't feel entirely mine.

Love changes rooms.
It doesn't vanish.

PRAYER FOR THE LIVING WHO REMAIN

The living remain
with dishes,
keys,
rent,
medicine,
forms,
children asking questions
no adult can answer cleanly.

The living remain
with a strange guilt
for being hungry
after the funeral.
For laughing.
For sleeping well once.
For noticing the sky.

God of the remaining,
don't let us confuse survival
with betrayal.

Teach us to eat
without apology.
Teach us to rest
without shame.
Teach us to continue

without turning the dead
into chains.

Let memory become bread,
not stone.
Let mourning become depth,
not identity.
Let the life still in us
honor the lives no longer visible.

We are not finished
because someone we loved
has crossed beyond our sight.

We are entrusted.

THE MANY LIGHTS

At evening,
the lights appear.

A candle near an icon.
A flame kept for truth.
A bulb above a hospital bed.
A phone held over scripture.
A small glow in a room
where someone has lost faith
but still refuses cruelty.

I used to ask
which light was closest to God.

Now I ask
which light helps the stranger
find the door.

Let the lights remain different.
And let blue remain blue.
Let gold remain gold.
Let silence remain silence.
Let song remain song.

But let no faith
call darkness holy
because it envies another flame.

God of many mercies,
make my belief bright enough
to guide,
soft enough
not to blind,
and honest enough
to admit
that Your compassion has windows
I have never opened.

THE TABLE BEYOND FEAR

I picture the final table
without argument at the door.

No one asking
which grief is permitted.

Nobody measuring doctrine
before bread.
No one checking
whether the dead arrived
by the correct road.

Only hunger met by welcome.
Only water passed hand to hand.
Only the strange recognition
that every soul
was lonely in a language
someone else could have learned.

At that table,
the child sits beside the elder.
The believer beside the doubter.
The one who prayed loudly
beside the one whose prayer
was simply not becoming cruel.

God of the table,
prepare me now
for that kind of mercy.

Remove from me
the need to be seated higher.
Remove from me
the need to prove
that my road was the only road
with stones in it.

Let me enter grateful.
I want to pass the bread.
Let joy arrive
as recognition,
not reward.

JOY WITH QUIET HANDS

Joy comes back quietly at first.
Not as parade.
Not as proof
that sorrow exaggerated.
Not as music loud enough
to silence the grave.
Joy comes back
as the first good breath
I don't distrust.
As tea warming the hand.
As a bird landing
on the wall
where bad news once stood.
As a child asking for a story
and expecting the world
to last until the ending.
I welcome this joy.
I won't punish it
for arriving after grief.

I won't ask it
to explain itself
before entering.

God of the quiet return,
let me be joyful
without becoming careless.
Let me be faithful
without becoming hard.
I want to remember death
without letting death
own the whole sky.

Life is still astonishing.
The body still knows music.
The soul still leans toward light.
The door opens inward.

And I am here,
held by a mercy
calm enough
to carry everything.

Psalm of the Olive Tree

The olive tree said,
I've seen empires come with iron shoes
and leave barefoot.
I have watched flags rise
like fever
and fall
like exhausted birds.

Still, I keep making fruit.

This is my answer to fire:
oil.
This is my answer to winter:
green.
This is my answer to sorrow:
roots, deeper than the rumor of ruin.

O people of dust and divinity,
learn from the branches—
they don't argue with the wind,
yet they outlive it.

There will be tables again.
There will be bread, thyme, laughter, tea.
And hands that trembled yesterday
will reach for each other
without fear.

--

Do not feel

Alhamdulillah

Support the Artist

For Those Who Wish to Give: